

BY ORDER OF THE SHAH

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*BY ORDER OF
THE SHAH*

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By
H W
AND
SIDNEY HAY



With 61 illustrations in sepia

BY THE SAME AUTHORS

AIR OVER EDEN (*Travel*)

BY H W

. . . SOMETHING NEW OUT
OF AFRICA (*Travel*)

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Dedicated to

HIS HIGHNESS RUMI-I-PADKA

WITHOUT WHOSE COMPANY OUR TRAVELS
WOULD HAVE LOST MUCH OF THEIR CHARM

AUTHORS' NOTE

RIZA SHAH imposes limits sternly repressing anyone likely to give the world unexpurgated news of Iran. Not only does the country remain difficult of access, but professional and commercial reins curb the tongue of the foreigner.

Much of the land has always been known as Iran by her own people, who claim descent from the great Aryan race. Persia originally denoted the southern province, when Persepolis was the capital of mighty kings. From deference to European usage, the authors have applied the name Persia to the past; and have conformed with the Shah's request by referring to Iran in the present—a typically Persian compromise.

Persia's poets were her historians—if poetry can be called history. Her more faithful portraits have ever been painted by her guests, those who journeyed through her land and wrote of what they saw and heard. Herodotus, Marco Polo, Chardin, Curzon, Browne, and Sykes stand out in a long line of distinguished travellers who have given colour to the distant canvas.

The authors lay no claim to distinction of either travel or letters. Moreover, they cannot describe all Iran, although they went there a matter of eight times, because, like Paradise, they have but sampled it.

Baghdad.

1937.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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ILLUSTRATIONS

—AT END—

Composite photograph.

"An archway, jagged and broken, crowned nothing more than a rubble of smashed bricks."

Corn mills of old Iran.

A ruined fountain on the Pa-i-tak Pass dating probably from the time of Shah Abbas, although some say the arch is Alexandrian.

"The road reeked of petrol trickling from the tank. The driver was smoking."

"Angels clad in Grecian draperies and clasping garlands, framed the main archway, pillars richly embossed with flowers."

"Some of the finest rock carvings in the world, in sculptured caves in the face of the mountain."

"Each side of the recess was decorated . . . with record of the chase."

Hamadan. "Like many another city, dreaming away in peaceful solitude, she ever echoed to the tread of war."

"A snake wound swiftly away."

"A stork flew overhead, to stand proudly on one leg upon its nest."

"Cleft by cascade and waterfall."

The garden of the new House of Parliament at Teheran. In the background stand three minarets of the only mosque in the world which has eight minarets.

ILLUSTRATIONS

"We strolled in the orchard among cherry trees."

One of the gates of the City of the Shadow of God, Teheran.

"A delicate blue loggia, shaped like a single lotus petal."

"The pool reflected the pillars standing before us, conjuring the forty of repute." The Hall of Forty Pillars.

"High loggias, decorated with faded pictures."

"The Ali Qapu, or Supreme Gate, crowned with a balcony, and built for royal receptions of great splendour."

Isfahan. "A romantic lane, an avenue of shaded trees, remote from the bustle of the town, yet near enough to hear the Living River rippling over the rounded stones."

The Painters' bazaar at Isfahan.

"In a donkey serai, the hard-worked little beasts enjoyed a brief and well-earned rest."

"Bread, sprinkled with caraway seeds, and rolled with swift surety into thin disks."

"The King's Mosque. . . . The great doorway, tiled in turquoise, lapis-lazuli, green and yellow, rose from squat inset pillars of carved Yezd alabaster."

"The Avenue of the Four Gardens, broad with the beauty of silver poplars and chenar trees nurtured by running streams."

"Bridges over the Living River."

"The Mullah's niche."

"*Mahelas*, from which she took aboard sacks of grain."

"The Shatt-al-Arab, river of dispute."

"Valerian's Bridge, a grand pile of seven stone arches, commanded by a fort, fallen into ruin."

"Bellicose khans, at convenient distances for travellers, showed coffee-coloured against the strangely thrown strata."

ILLUSTRATIONS

"Sadi's tomb, set in isolation some way out of the town."

"A small boy led two brightly caparisoned ponies . . . another leading a white donkey with a crimson saddle set upon a brightly woven rug."

"Cypresses and firs towered above the mud wall. Chellan, the Place of Forty Graves." In the foreground lies a vineyard in winter garb.

"A square pool, choked with autumn leaves from the plane trees, reflected the tomb of Hafiz."

"The slender columns of Persepolis were silhouetted."

Bas-reliefs adorning the façade of the flight of steps leading to the Hall of Audience at Persepolis.

"Massive blocks of stone formed two wide staircases rising to a paved courtyard, once bordered by high walls."

"Gaunt stones, pregnant with age."

"The central motifs were of a lion, claws buried deep in the quarters of a rearing bull, which raised a foreleg and pawed the air in agony."

"Upon the sides of the high plinth, figures in bas-relief."

"We passed on our way to what was once the harem."

"Cut into the hill behind we saw two ancient tombs, ornamented with sculpture."

"A flock of fat-tailed sheep, plump and well-liking, moving slowly towards hills which assumed a spurious velvety quality in the winter sunlight."

"Yezdikast, a large, half-ruined village, perched precariously on the edge of a deep gash in the plain."

A new use for old petrol tins.

"Flames leapt twenty or thirty feet into the air, smoke above them."

ILLUSTRATIONS

"A square mile of land in Masjid-i-Suleiman, where they sunk a well called M. One."

"They produced whole sheep skins, still hairy, which they inflated through a leg. These were then lashed beneath thin, straight branches to form a raft."

The potter's mite.

"Speak unto the believing women . . . that they restrain their eyes and preserve their modesty."

The Bank of Iran.

"Let them throw their veils over their bosoms."

Come fill the cup.

A famous Persian carpet of life-size portraits of ministers and diplomats, at the Court of Persia.

"Three hundred thousand children attend the schools."

"He decreed that his citizens should wear a peaked affair, like a French kepi, but taller."

"Those who would trade with her must keep in close and constant touch with her markets."

"We stopped near a squat tower built astride a stream. . . . It was a flour mill."

PROLOGUE

IN the crisp air of Kurdistan, we looked across flower-filled valleys gay with scarlet poppies, blue anchusa, and the ethereal pink of gypsophila. Beyond lay the snow-clad mountains of Iran.

The road was bad. An unexpected shower had laid the dust. Between persistent tufts of liquorice, primitive ploughs scraped the earth, keeping pace with a fussy steam-roller strangely incongruous in that remote setting. The road twisted and turned, undulating like a scenic railway, descent always a little less steep than ascent. Like the old peasant dance, we seemed to take two steps forward and one back, as we climbed to the heights, hoping that the frontier guards would allow us to gaze upon Iran.

We amused each other by seeing who could count the most varieties of flowers. For ourself, we liked the wild hollyhocks best. Some had a single white blossom barely a couple of inches from the ground. Most were three or four feet high, mauve and white and pink, in lavish profusion. A few, more enterprising than their sisters, reached the conventional height of eight or nine feet. Colour crept over the brown earth, except where the white road bent away. Tulips, anemones, and ranunculus vied with jonquils, narcissi, hyacinths, and lilies of the valley, amid a riot of pinks, gilliflowers, marigolds, jasmine, sunflowers, and violets, patterning the slopes for all the world like an exotic Persian carpet heavy with perfume.

An aeroplane circled overhead. A message fluttered to earth at our feet.

“Have parked a case of beer at ‘Diana,’” we read.

PROLOGUE

We hoped the pilot had landed his load with due reverence. Nearing the frontier, the aeroplane, careful not to traverse the boundary, circled and made for home.

The road to Iran followed a stream, crossing it at Rayak, and climbed steeply over rolling steppes. Snow-clad mountains towered above and ever nearer. Suddenly a gendarme in field-blue barred the way. Only the driver, who was a local Kurd, spoke Persian, but it needed no knowledge of the language to understand that the gendarme was annoyed. We gathered that we must be over the border. The man became more difficult. From a tumble-down mud shanty he summoned an even shabbier individual clutching a rusty rifle, and ordered him to mount guard over the car, making him sit on the bonnet.

Argument. Some was translated. Some was left to the imagination. We must go to the nearest village. Were we not in Iran; with a large map of the frontier, and without a passport between us? Fishy, to say the least of it! We could see four Iranian eyes grow round at the thought. Possibly a step on the ladder of advancement. Perhaps a bonus in the background. Accompanied by the sentry, who seemed far more scared of us than we of him, we drove on as we were bid. Leaning forward, we pushed the catch of his rifle to safe, although he assured us it was not loaded.

Our way lay through some of the most lovely country that it had ever been our fortune to see. Somehow we had not connected Iran with wide sweeping beauty. In our ignorance we pictured small compact valleys in formal precision, and a kind of orderly artistic abandon, if there can be such a combination. Yet there we were, traversing wide valleys of rich green, severed by silver streams, where the contours ended in sky or snow. Amid the meadows, upon a road graded by the Russians twenty years before, we passed a little mud-plastered fort straight out of the middle ages, four square, with loop-holes and circular turrets, a rivulet bubbling through the central courtyard.

PROLOGUE

Some minutes later we pulled up before a gateway in a high mud wall. Endless chat ensued; about us, we gathered. Not one among the whole lot of scrubby officials discussing our case did a thing. We strolled up and down the road, shadowed by the sentry, who, after an hour or so, complained that his feet hurt him. Dusk descended. No one would give a decision about anything. Cholera threatened to overcome our sense of the ridiculous. It was nearly dark, so we entered the office and demanded accommodation. They showed us where we could dine off such scraps of our picnic luncheon as remained, as well as eggs and chicken generously provided by a woman who lived in the house. Later, we left the room to our elders, and slept, or rather writhed, in the cars all night. Cold it was, too. We borrowed quilts which nearly walked out on us, as soon as the warmth of our bodies awoke the murderous passions of smaller and more active travellers.

The day dawned bright, very early. We washed as best we could in the stream sparkling with cold. The day dragged on. Talk. Delay without end. Then more talk. Eventually we blindly signed several statements written in picturesque characters. We were free to make our return whence we came.

Breathing a sigh of relief when we reached Rayak, tangible evidence of 'Iraqi soil, we registered a vow to return to Iran, to probe this fascinating land of strange contrasts; and, moreover, to return in the spring. Her ancient history and modern progress had cast their spell upon us.

PART I

IRAN—A PERSIAN SYMPHONY

BY ORDER OF THE SHAH

CHAPTER I

THE HIGHWAY OF NATIONS

PERSIA, called the Highway of Nations by all her historians, has ever been the route of invasion from the West, and of Western ambition in the East. Famous names have blazed the trail through the land, of a history vivid with great marches and greater conquests. Cyrus, Darius, Alexander, Genghis Khan, and Timurlane, to name but five great captains, campaigned through her rolling plains and gaunt valleys and over her mountain passes.

The road we took from the 'Iraqi border, beaten beneath the tread of centuries, was built as far as Hamadan by Britain during the Great War, thence to Kazvin and the Caspian by the Russians. It was as good as any we met on our travels.

The obstacles used to be lawless bandits, hazards normal to a long journey by horse and camel. To-day the same route is more swiftly traversed by car, and for that matter by air, the main obstacles those imposed by the police and customs authorities. A traveller in Iran soon learned to be neither surprised nor harassed when he was stopped at the entrance and exit of each village with a demand for his passport, often read upside down. Like it or not, he was sure to be held up, for five minutes or more than an hour. What was time? Further, at Qasr-i-

Shirin he had, until recently, to undergo the rigours of a medical examination by an Iranian doctor seeking to establish freedom from the pox and palsy. Absurd? We thought so. Yet such rules compared favourably with those in mediæval England, witness the bill unearthed from an old parish register:

“Paid for whipping three people yt had the small pox, 8d. Paid for whipping Mrs. Mitchel 4d., for whipping Goody Brady 4d., and—to the constable—for searching a woman named London to see if she was with child before she was whipped, 2/-.”

A recent journey across the frontier from ‘Iraq to Iran found us acting as escort to a Distinguished Personage on his way to an audience with the Shah. We left Baghdad in the heat of a June day of her hottest year, motored across the desert in two cars to Khanaqin, and spent the night at the railway rest house.

There were two sides, and goodness knows how many arguments, to this sort of adventure. Our arrival at Khanaqin, all that courtesy and deference could make it, failed to overcome the fact that there was but one room for men, and one labelled Ladies. Fortunately we looked like having the place to ourselves. With perspicacity born of experience, we (the “we” is editorial) took the ladies’ room, after settling the D.P. comfortably within that entire estate prescribed by the normal routine of the rest house.

Beginner’s luck. A car arrived from Teheran with a charming American who had every right to our temporary abode. Our luggage, astride the only bed, established an *entente cordiale*, under a tacit understanding that milady took her bath in strict seclusion. She was to leave that night, and kindly protested that we need move neither ourself nor our belongings. Later she graced our dinner table upon the platform, and left at eleven, after

which we took to our beds upon the same site. Where we dined we slept.

The night's rest was fitful, thanks to the meanderings of vagrant Kurds stalking across the line, coughing and yoicking in the inimitable way of the East, in vile ignorance of the majesty lying almost beneath their feet. From a disturbed slumber, long before dawn, the morning train from Baghdad awakened us. As the bustle subsided, our eyes started from their sockets. We must have died and gone to Heaven after all. We were in Paradise. The Paradise of the Assassins? Not one or two, but a myriad faery forms of quite the right shape flitted about us, disporting themselves in flimsy robes. Time drifted on her way as our senses took vague stock, and we began to realize that we were being honoured by the visit of a theatrical troupe. You must have spent a year or two in the outposts to realize what that meant.

It was all very well to pretend to no interest and no embarrassment when we lay on a silly little bed, a few feet from the edge of a station platform, and a troupe of cabaret artistes arrived with the early dawn. We were still in possession of the ladies' room. Fortunately we wore our best silk pyjamas. Our elegant dressing-gown was close at hand. Thus emboldened, we felt that the time had come to arise and make appropriate advances towards those who had obvious claim to our abode.

We moved slowly, lest they took alarm at our presence. Two in particular, in the half-light more sylph-like than the rest, gave us to think that they might be houris come to lighten man's earthly burden. One carried a dog. What language were they likely to speak?

"Nice little dog," we said.

A sickly grin spread o'er our features and crept across the early morning. Milady of the dog looked at us. We had not registered. A glance disclosed her companion to be an older woman—much older. The situation dawned

more clearly. Nothing daunted, although conscious that our pyjamas were brushing the dirty floor of the station, and that we must look like the back legs of an elephant, we again advanced. French, probably. We sailed in.

"*Quel chien,*" we began.

Mélisande grew brighter.

"*Il est très gentil.*"

We were nearing the end of our vocabulary. She smiled. That was better. The barrier was raised. A flood of French oratory descended upon our not too facile ears. Apparently Dodo, clearly not extinct, was being smuggled into Iran. Clasped firmly beneath her robe, in charge of the older and larger woman, Dodo left for a railway carriage door, returned to store. Thence, willy-nilly, we heard a yap, yap, yap from the wretched little beast, wildly calling attention to its plight.

Meanwhile the younger girl, whom we gauged to be about twenty years old, told us she could speak no English, and that only two or three of the troupe spoke French. They were, she said, cabaret artistes on their way to Teheran, twelve girls and two men. Karloff, one of the men, had the appearance of being more than an ordinary troupier. There was something trim and agile about him. His hair, parted in the middle, was close-cut, crowning a lined face which obviously had a tale to tell. This trip alone must have added years to his age, and several puckers to an already rippled brow. He and another man, who obviously provided the comic relief, had shepherded their twelve lambs across a desert and a half, after days of inertia in the train, to face yet more dull days on the road. Karloff spoke English.

"What the hell! This place not good for my chickens."

We hastily explained our present purpose, to assure him that although we occupied the ladies' room, we would of course vacate it for his chickens, who by this time

clustered around us in all stages of undress. Poor devils, their lot must have been tough. To encounter, three-quarters of the way through a desperately tiring journey, and so early in the morning, strange men speaking a strange language, gave them little chance to appear at their best. They seemed content to flit hither and thither in fussy effort to take their places aboard the big charabanc waiting outside the station. Great trunks preceded them, presumably containing stage props, as the party slowly made ready to leave. All the time someone or other called for Karloff, followed by a rapid gabble in a tongue unknown to us.

The artistes were of all ages, but mostly one shape. Austrians, Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, Russians, they carried suitcases, hatboxes, and smuggled dogs which all the time barked furiously beneath furbelows. The embarrassed mistresses sought to drown the noise with song. How they hoped to outwit the customs official we could not fathom, but since they had so far succeeded, they were not likely to suffer effective opposition kindly.

We dressed, and breakfasted upon some tinned mess melted by the sun of the previous day, and upon vile eggs evilly cooked and broken.

"Karloff!"

We heard the plaintive cry for the last time as we left for the border, shortly before the other party were under way, in spite of their early show of speed.

We had surprisingly little difficulty with the 'Iraqi customs. There were two frontier posts, a mile or two apart, each with a toll bar across the road, where passports were scrutinized. Our arrival at the Iranian post, however, was greeted by a few drowsy underlings, most of whom were asleep on the floor, or had obviously been disturbed by our strident motor horns. The cars stopped. An entertainment promised. We ushered the D.P. into the stalls and betook ourself to the pit. We knew our

man and were more than content to take a back seat. He carried a special letter, heavily embossed with the Shah's crest, to ensure that we did not suffer unduly from ignorant officials seeking to justify themselves and to earn at least the right to be paid, if not the pay itself. That letter proved invaluable.

"Where is the customs officer?"

A few vague moves were unintelligible in their aim. We entered the building, and were shown to the inevitable wooden bench along the wall of a dirty little office. We had seen that sort of thing before. The D.P., from a wider experience than our own, knew what it meant. Delay. Perhaps for hours. He was immediate master of the situation.

"Where is the officer?" he demanded.

The underling looked at him in blank astonishment and shuffled out. Alone? Not on your life! Hot on his heels followed the D.P. Not for him the leisure of the uncomfortable sofas. Not for him such a patent trap. We followed.

"Où est le douanier?"

Nothing happened. The henchman stood still and looked at us blankly.

"Where is he, you plum-coloured bog-rat?" This from us, inspired, and anxious to do our bit too.

It seemed to dawn on the Iranian that he might be up against something unusual. The parallel of the irresistible blonde who encountered the immovable bachelor irrelevantly leapt to mind. The bog-rat scuttled to an inner room, whence we heard sounds of the Great Panjandrum Himself being awakened by his most despised slave. The Iranian equivalent of "go to blazes," followed by references to relatives, polluted the morning. Then silence. The god was drifting back into lethargy, despite the efforts of his factotum. We were on the threshold of defeat. The D.P. applied a spur.

"Come on," he called. "Hurry up. I can't stay here all day."

Even the god realized that these stentorian tones heralded an unusual visitor. He had better get up after all.

At this stage the representative of a German engineering firm joined us. Speaking fluent English, and looking a shade dishevelled, his face bore signs of an infinite and practised patience.

"They kept me here all night," he said, glancing round the squalid hut with anything but pleasure. "I arrived from Kermanshah after five o'clock, when the Customs House officially closes. They would not clear me, so I had to sleep in my car until this morning. What makes it more annoying is that two miles farther on I could have rested in comfort at the railway station. I might even have caught the train last night. I have waited one hour already this morning."

We searched his face, whereon lay proof that, from bitter experience, he had found the course of waiting the only possible one to cope with the leisurely authorities. He was soon to see otherwise. The D.P. cleared decks for action.

"Is he getting up?" he demanded.

Yes, he was. Shortly afterwards, from the inner room came a tousled grey head of hair set on a tall frame, still half-asleep and blinking strangely at us.

"Do you speak English?"

Grisly wagged his head. We understood nothing by the movement.

"*Parlez-vous Français?*"

"*Certainement.*"

"*Bon. Monsieur est le douanier?*"

The D.P. tempered justice with mercy. He resorted to the sword only when he deemed the sword to be necessary.

"Et bien, Monsieur. Voici une lettre pour Sa Majesté le Shah, que le Ministre de l'Iran à Bagdad m'a donné."

Grisly slowly perused the magic contents. Then he read it again, the right way up. He remarked the crest. Finally he bowed slightly, and beamed. Iran surrendered. Our small army of occupation might proceed.

"Nous serons enchantés, Monsieur, de vous donner toutes facilités. Vos passeports, s'il vous plaît?"

A few subordinates undulated into the room, attracted by the noise and bustle. Something untoward must be afoot, or why had their god risen so early in the morning? Slowly they tackled the work of clearing passports and customs, as if the whole day was before them, as indeed it was. Our haste did not matter. Someone made copious entries in a huge ledger about all of us, drivers included. Then, by your leave, a policeman started to copy the whole thing again into another book. He did not get far. The D.P. rose in his wrath, entering the lists with a vengeance, upon the first joust of many tourneys. He had stood all and more than his limit. Waving the crested letter, he commanded us to collect the passports; and in his suavest French challenged the bewildered hierarchy of Iranians. They must, he pointed out, have obtained the information they wanted. Need they repeat it all over again? (Letter waved judiciously before eyes widening at such importunity.)

"Monsieur," the D.P. said, countenance composed in fierce resolve. *"Est-ce nécessaire?"*

Apparently not. Without more ado, and in an atmosphere of strained politeness, the proceedings concluded abruptly. We appeared to be privileged. About three-quarters of an hour, all told, had sufficed. We went on our journey, saying good-bye to the patient German, who could scarce hope to whip the officials into enthusiasm a second time. We shook the legion of proffered hands,

returned all the smiles upon all the faces, and left like the wind.

The first village was Qasr-i-Shirin, ancient ruins presiding over nothing more than rambling mud hovels. The old castle was named by King Khosroe after his lovely queen. An archway, jagged and broken, crowned a rubble of smashed bricks, mute testimony to the ecstasy of Shirin sighing for the lowly Ferhad, her young lover, or anointing herself for her royal master. We sailed gaily through the village until we decided to fill up with petrol. A mistake. The inevitable policeman arrived, our second brush with officialdom, and that within about twenty minutes. The word police seemed synonymous with trouble.

Next door to the petrol shop (nothing so modern as garage or pump) was the police station, a mere hole in the wall, furnished with a rude table and a couple of benches. An ink-pot, some dirty paper, and a scruffy pen adorned the table, behind which sat a thin Iranian (we hardly ever saw a fat one) clad in field-blue uniform, one leg of his breeches reaching to his ankle, the other crushed into a dirty and faded blue puttee. Beside him stood two other outward and visible signs of the inward forces of law and order, gods divine in their right, powers in the land over which they held petty sway.

One of our drivers, Ferdinand, spoke Persian. The passports were in demand for the third time within an hour, and there were over two thousand miles ahead of us. Unfortunately we forgot to wave the magic letter. The omission was nearly fatal. Just as we thought all was set fair for the rest of the journey, Ferdinand translated a message that two of us must go to the hospital.

"Why?" we asked. "You have our vaccination certificates. The passports are in order."

"Two must go to the hospital."

A bland far-away look, faint link with Mongol ancestry,

crept over the faces of the policemen. We blustered and stormed. We raged and fumed. We protested. We pleaded. We told them in English, which they did not understand, exactly what we thought of them and of their female relations. The D.P. was in his element. He began a fierce tirade on the iniquities of their pernicious system, with sufficient blood about to make a battle royal.

That was enough. Actually, too much. By the time we had finished giving them a piece of our mind, those policemen changed theirs completely, but, by your leave, the wrong way! All of us must go to the hospital. Do as we would, we had to retreat for the time being. They had our passports. Equipped with a guide, we motored about a mile until we were brought up short by some large iron gates. The D.P. was not the man to be stopped by a little matter like that.

"Open!" he commanded.

An incredulous look swept over the faces of guide and porter, who stood rooted to the spot. Whatever the force, this time the object was clearly immovable. We accepted the inevitable, and deemed it wiser and quicker to get out and walk through the wicket gate. Once inside, we told Ferdinand to seek the whereabouts of the doctor. Two or three inmates appeared. Someone seemed anxious to guide our footsteps towards the eastern wing of the large building, and bowed us through a doorway. It was the same old story. There were the chairs, the table, and the inevitable couch. Apart from those, the cupboard was bare. There was no doctor. We could hear the rattle of tea being prepared.

"Where is the doctor?" demanded the D.P. "Go and get the doctor! The Doctor! The *Doctor!* Tell him, Ferdinand. For heaven's sake, tell him we want the doctor at once. This minute! Now!"

Apparently the gentleman in question was operating on some unfortunate, but he might not be long. Would

we take a seat? We knew what that meant. It might be hours before he deigned to interview us. We left immediately, refusing to take the guide in the car, much to his consternation, and drove back to the police station.

"Whatever you do, get hold of the passports," said the D.P. to us.

We reached our tormentors.

"We have been to the hospital. Everything is all right there. We may go on."

During the ensuing argument we collected the passports, ostensibly to examine them.

"Where are your certificates from the doctor?"

The D.P. decided that the time had come to make a bold move.

"Get into the cars, everybody. Go on, get in. Ferdinand, thank them. Say we are all right now. Good-bye," saluting and smiling as blandly as any Iranian. "Drive off quickly. Don't argue, just go!"

Pursued by shouts, we went on our way, passports in hand, and the prospect of a long wait behind us. Later we learned that it was customary for all travellers entering Iran to be medically examined, which frequently spelt hours and sometimes days of delay. Mercifully, the formalities were later waived.

Here it was that a police officer was recently sacked for the third time. Soon afterwards, his erstwhile beat earned an unenviable reputation. Shots rang out to disturb peaceful nights. The authorities seriously considered reinstating him until they found that he was responsible for the disorders. He sought to show that during his tenure of office he had been efficient, and that as soon as he was relieved of his job, authority would rue the day.

CHAPTER II

FROM CLIME TO CLIME

WINDING from the ruins of the castle of Qasr-i-Shirin, the road meandered towards the hills, alongside a new aqueduct. For the first time we observed the Pahlevi spade, about seven feet long, designed by the lazy peasant to save him stooping to his work, that he might the more easily remove a light load from field and road.

We climbed the Pa-i-tak Pass. Ferdinand pointed to the remains of a motor which had evidently started a head-long career from the top, hurtling from rock to rock, leaving bits on the way. We had never seen one car spread over so large an area, and were glad to be safely near the summit. Round a hairpin bend we came upon a lorry lying on its side. Although the load of full petrol tins was intact, the road reeked of petrol trickling from the tank. The driver was smoking. We sidled round like a horse shying at a traction engine, expecting flames to burst out at any moment.

"It's Friday, the thirteenth," said the D.P. gloomily, clinging to the side of the car, and staring pessimistically at the remains of another lorry lying forlornly where it had fallen.

We passed five more wrecks in varying stages of decay, and did not feel better until we reached the top of the pass and began to traverse the broad Karind plain, some four thousand feet above sea-level. Everywhere the vineyards were green with grapes, water from the hills coursing through narrow channels radiating from springs. Crops

in some places relied solely upon rain water, but in many parts the slight fall was unevenly divided, so that the peasants had evolved water-courses of their own. In northern India, 'Iraq, and Iran, hereditary water diviners indicated the site for a new well, often half-way up a hill. When this showed signs of running dry, another well was dug at a lower level, the two connected by an underground channel. Gradually a series of wells was formed, eventually emerging as a green-edged stream burbling down the parched hillside, to be tapped at will. In other places small canals, graded round the contours, carried water from mountain spring to gentle slope. In days gone by the Mir Aub, or Persian Prince of Wales, held the Crown rights over all water. To collect the dues, his agent laid upon the canal a thin copper bowl with a small hole pierced in the centre. Through this the water welled, so that the bowl filled slowly and went to the bottom. Charge was made for the number of times the bowl sank while the water flowed on to the land.

On our way to Kermanshah, we saw thousands of sheep grazing. Like the peasants, cows, horses, donkeys, and camels seemed beset by their offspring. We passed families carrying all their worldly goods on their backs or on their beasts. Mother and daughter astride one pony lagged behind the majesty of the head of the house upon another. After them trailed donkeys big and small, bearing the household possessions. At times the road seemed strewn with donkeys, in bunches of five to fifty, loads cunningly packed by practised hands; for the donkey had taken the place of the horse. Herodotus remarked that a hundred and fifty thousand horses once grazed upon these plains, yet when Alexander the Great passed by, nine-tenths had disappeared. The valleys of Iran, like the plains of 'Iraq, were ever rich in horseflesh. For centuries an Arab strain was the backbone of horse-breeding all over the world. The hardy conditions under

which these horses were reared, allowed but one drink a day and sparse fare, ensured that the stock had stamina, and was one which crossed well with others.

We passed the village of Shahabad, renowned for beautiful women, and named Harounabad in honour of the Caliph Haroun-ar-Rashid, who sojourned there. The specimens of female beauty we saw did not make us feel drawn to spend the rest of our lives there. They wore big black turbans, fringes falling into their eyes and long ends hanging behind, like those of Kurdish women. The village had an air of new prosperity. Pretentious houses gazed on an upstart petrol pump. We drew up with a flourish, only to have our tank filled from a tin. The complacency of Shahabad came from the new national sugar factory at the gates, capable of producing four hundred tons daily; and partly from the petrol depôt a few kilometres away.

"Look at me," the village seemed to say. "How clever I am to triumph over my natural disabilities of remote ignorance."

We passed a large man seated astride the quarters of an exceedingly small donkey, his white shoes trailing in the dust.

"As I ride on my ass
On the top of my ass,
A paradox strange you will find;"

murmured the D.P.,

"For the whole of my ass
Is on top of my ass,
While the rest of my ass is behind."

Donkey and bullock yoked to the same plough scratched the fertile earth. Here and there the soft green of young corn relieved an austere valley. Gnarled trees lifted tortuous branches to the blue sky. Two small boys galloped bare-

back on tousled ponies, shouts resounding as they rounded up the herd. We stopped again to show our passports. An urchin, his fair hair flaming with henna, hawked primitive brass padlocks.

After four hours' motoring, Kermanshah appeared, offering prospect of a wash and some food. The usual police post heralded the town, flying the Lion and the Sun, which until lately was the Persian standard, portraying a golden lion crouching in front of the rays of the sun, upon a field of green. The lion had the features of a woman, those of the favourite playmate of an infatuated Shah. The "Cat and Cabbage," as the ribald soldiery dubbed it in the war, was abolished in favour of horizontal stripes of red, white, and green, which also adorned the pillar boxes.

Kermanshah marked the end of a pipe-line capable of carrying about seventy-thousand gallons of oil a day, from Naft-i-Shah over the Pa-i-tāk Pass, to a refinery able to give a yearly output of some five million tons.

The field, serving Iraq and Iran, lay in the foothills on the border, tapped by both countries. The problem before the oil company was whether to use a big pipe and low pressure, or a small one and high pressure. The Iranians preferred the larger pipe, appearances being what they were; but they were persuaded to take the small one with a pressure of fifteen-hundred pounds per square inch. The pipe-line, wrapped in asbestos, felt, and hot bituminous mastic, led to the refining plant and distribution centre a little way outside Kermanshah and near the Qarasu River. This refinery fed north-west Iran, save when the roads were rendered impassable by snow: then storage tanks at Kazvin came into play.

Was it significant that about two thousand Jews, with unerring instinct for going where money was to be made, lived there?

In Kermanshah we saw the first signs of unveiling.

Many women teachers and pupils had cast aside the veil in favour of European clothes, berets set at a fashionably precarious angle. These girls affected thick cotton stockings of a crude shade of soap pink, and seemed unable to keep them pulled taut.

An unusual dome caught our eye. We had heard of mosques tiled in many colours, or overlaid in gold leaf, but never in silver. The dome took our fancy, but we did not get near enough to remark detail. Weeks afterwards we heard that it was covered with flattened kerosine tins.

We made for the Consulate, a large house with the pool common to Iranian dwellings of rank. During the war the building was destroyed, and was not rebuilt until ten years ago. There we met Rumi, destined to be our oracle, and appointed to look after us throughout the journey. He succeeded beyond our wildest dreams. His full name was Rumi-i-Pakda. If we were unable to capture the happy flow of his speech, it was our loss, and the fault of a memory unable to recall the many things that pleased us.

"*Salaam 'aleikum*—Peace on you," he said, bowing low in courtly fashion.

"*Wa 'aleikum as salaam*—On you peace," we answered.

"You approach near my heart," he continued. "Mine eyes are enlightened by seeing you. May you grow fat, that your shadow be broader."

We were charmed, but could not rise to such eloquence. Indeed, we found the Iranians essentially a sociable race: manners good, conversation bright and often witty, but they spoke in metaphor, allowing their minds to reign over their words.

"We thank you," we replied, as anxious to please as he, but unendowed with the same gilt for the lily. "We envy you your country."

"It is not the silkworm, but he who wears the silk vest

who is to be envied," replied Rumi with a twinkle. "Behold the silkworm. She produces silk for others. Not until she has spun it does she become a butterfly to flutter in the sun. If Your Excellence will permit, my first pleasure is to show you where the Governor minds his own business."

Fathoming the idioms of our new friend promised to be part of the day's play. At this rate he would not only be an oracle but something of an education into the bargain.

We visited the Governor, an immaculately clad Iranian who wore spats and spoke French. The business of clearing our passports, it seemed, would take some time. It was the last day of a religious festival. Unfortunately he who must scribble hieroglyphics upon the appropriate page, was absent. As our time was limited, we decided to leave Rumi to cope with the documents, while we visited Taq-i-Bustan, the Throne of the Garden, where some of the finest rock carvings in the world, in sculptured caves in the face of the mountain, gazed upon the snow-fed pool. Taq-i-Bustan. The name had a pleasant roll. In Sassanian days the garden must in truth have resembled the Paradise claimed for it. We saw willow trees sheltering dilapidated statuary, relic of the days of Khosroe, dignity marred by a new wall of yellow brick. Bas-reliefs inside two grottoes claimed our attention.

Approaching a straw hat which seemed to have some pretensions beneath it, we asked the owner if he spoke English or French. The answer was English, but only just.

"How old are these carvings?" we asked.

"Six thousand years B.C."

We looked at him sideways.

"Six thousand B.C.?" we questioned doubtfully.

"More than six thousand years B.C.," he reiterated.

He seemed to know few other words, except some names,

and those were mostly wrong. He pointed proudly to the more obvious carvings.

"Wild boars," he said.

A bas-relief showed wild boars all right, dozens of them, and elephants, camels, stags, and bison as well.

"Prophet Nu, Underworld," was his next exhibit.

We took his word for it.

"Khosroe! Khosroe! Khosroe!"

He seemed anxious to impress us that the central figure was the great Sassanian monarch. The leg of an equestrian gentleman unhappily had been broken—by the Russians, according to our unreliable and self-imposed guide.

"Six thousand years B.C."

Apparently the man had a feeling that the older the object the bigger the *baksheesh*, and he was not going to let in on anything less than eight millennia if he could help it.

In our ignorance, we assumed that the carvings guarded a royal tomb. Angels, clad in Grecian draperies and clasping garlands, framed the main archway, pillars richly embossed with flowers. The central figure within, cut in high relief, was a horseman about fifteen feet high, encased in chain mail from top to toe, save for two enormous eyes. He carried shield and lance. His feet were thrust into shovel stirrups. The saddlery was rich, heavily caparisoned with knotted fringe and tassels. Upon a ledge above stood another group. Archæologists differed about the origin, although expert opinion inclined to the view that this group belonged to Khosroe. Who were we to state definitely that one was Khosroe, when some said he was Rustam? That a second was Shirin, when others said she was Gypsœ? Two figures offered to a central one what looked like a laurel wreath adorned with long streamers, probably the Magna Carta of submission to Khosroe the Conqueror whose head-dress bore an emblem of the Crescent, or maybe of the Two Horns. The hand

of the vandal had been at work, for the features were defaced.

Each side of the recess was decorated for fifteen or twenty feet with record of the chase. Upon the right, five rows of elephants ridden by mahouts seemed to tread the same medium with large boats, all chasing wild boars the same size as the elephants. Among lanky reeds a man equipped with bow and arrow stood in a boat. Upon the opposite wall, a copse depicted a forest, through which horsemen galloped *ventre à terre* after fleeing stags. Beneath a regal umbrella, held by attendants, rode the king himself. Above the hunting scene was a gaudy group of four figures, better preserved than the others; believed to have been carved for the Governor of Kermanshah at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Two berobed courtiers, in full regalia, loaded with pearls and studded with jewels, paid homage to a figure seated upon a throne and attended by a page. The whole was framed in a decorated archway.

Some yards along the rock-face, within a smaller grotto, a counsellor supported a couple of ambassadors wearing elaborate uniforms, with spurs, swords, and high plumed head-dresses. They carried wreaths. Two inscriptions recorded that the figure on the right was Shapur, and that on the left was Bahram.

A few yards on, three more figures had been carved in the bare rock. One head rested against the conventional rays of the sun. All wore long beards. Shapur stood upon the prostrate body of a Roman soldier, symbolizing his victories over the Emperor Constantine, avenged by Julian. After Julian's death, Shapur once more repelled the Romans and forced them to sign a peace, by which Persia not only regained the provinces Rome had conquered, but annexed several others.

"Here the bold sculptor bids the mountain's side
Speak Rome's disgrace, and lofty Shapur's pride."

We found something more robust and enduring about Taq-i-Bustan than about many places of antiquity. Sassanian art at its best was reflected in these rock-hewn statues. The bas-reliefs at Taq-i-Bustan were even finer than those Italy produced a thousand years later. With the exception of the coloured carvings, the work probably belonged to one dynasty, although the craftsmanship of the larger recess was earlier and appreciably better than that of the second.

We liked to believe that our guide was correct when he told us that a handsome young sculptor confessed his regard for Shirin, the queen of Khosroe, and made himself responsible for the grottoes, in return for royal favours. Straw Hat related the tale to us in staccato English which left little to the imagination. We could not wait to hear the end, and climbed into the car to seek Rumi, who, at sound of the horn, emerged in a bustle of importance.

"Sir P." (Rumi invariably missed the D part and addressed him as plain Sir P.) "Is your Excellence ready to start?"

Every stately man of rank is Excellence in Iran. We packed into the cars and covered Kermanshah with our dust. Some sheep passed slowly by.

"The dust of a flock of sheep," observed Rumi, "is *tutia* to the eyes of a hungry wolf."

Tutia was a preparation used as balm for the eyes. We took the hint and offered him a bottle of beer, which he lapped down with avidity.

Twenty-five miles on, high above the roadside, beyond tumbled boulders, rose a sheer rock face with barely discernible scratches: Bisitun, the last and highest of a chain of hills. For hundreds of years travellers passed by without so much as a glance at the queer marks high above them. The Persians thought that the gods had fashioned the signs, so ancient and shrouded in mystery were they. Actually they bore an account of the campaigns of Darius.

To ensure that vandals should not deface his masterpiece, the rock was cut sheer away, that it might be out of reach of man. The script was protected by a varnish which evermore withstood the elements.

In 1827 a youth, aged seventeen, sailed for Bombay, to enter the service of the Honourable East India Company. Like Claudius Rich of the same employ, he had a flair for languages, and, by the time he was twenty, had mastered many tongues. He went to Persia and threw his energies into reorganizing the Shah's army. Often, in the course of his military duties, would he draw rein at Bisitun and ponder what lay beneath the sculptured frieze. He scrambled up the hillside as far as he was able, but he could see little without a ladder, for there was practically no foothold. Once, indeed, to reach a certain part of the inscription, his ladder could only rest upon one leg. Suddenly it broke. One side crashed to the rocks, hundreds of feet below. He lost his balance and fell, clutching the remaining side, which happily bore his weight and enabled him to climb into safety, inch by inch.

He succeeded in copying the whole of the Persian and Median inscriptions, but found the Babylonian impossible to reach from any angle, for it was carved upon an outcrop of rock.

For three years he played with his absorbing cross-word puzzle, writing a rough draft to explain his labours. Summoned to the Afghan War, he was forced to abandon the task. Returning a few years later, the rock carvings and familiar inscriptions once again fired his ambition. A young and strong Kurdish boy, who delighted in climbing, managed to defeat the forethought of Darius. With the aid of rope, pegs, and a hammer, he fashioned a kind of workman's cradle, swinging himself over the precipice, transcribing the whole in ten days.

In Baghdad, through summer and winter, the Englishman revised and added, polished and selected, spending

long hours in a summer-house at the end of his garden, the roof saturated with Tigris water. Young and Champollion had the Greek script to aid them in deciphering the Rosetta Stone. The soldier working away in Baghdad had no guide. Some years earlier Grotefend had shot an arrow in the right direction, but the Englishman did not know this. Nor did he know that a doctor, in a quiet Irish village, was wrestling with the same problem.

The soldier finally unravelled the secret of cuneiform writing, laying bare the oldest known history of civilization. Of the three plaques, in Babylonian, Susian, and Old Persian, the originals were those of the Achæmenian kings. Alexander added Persian. At last, in 1846, the Royal Asiatic Society published the result of the Englishman's labours. At the time many people, even scientists, thought he had invented his interpretation of the baffling writing. Then came the great opportunity for sceptics to test the unknown quantity. In Mesopotamia, Layard had made his wonderful discoveries, including a clay tablet bearing arrow-shaped characters. Four scholars were asked to decipher copies of the script, using the new key. Each produced identical names and dates in the story of Tiglath-Pileser. The vital clue lay in the titles of the two kings.

The Englishman's name, soon to be great with fame, was Rawlinson.

We climbed half-way up the hill of Bisitun, five thousand feet above sea-level, arriving a few hundred feet nearer, and a little breathless. From a welcome boulder the images looked no larger, but rather clearer. With one arm extended, and an eye shut, the tallest figure was as big as a finger-nail, yet we knew each to be nine feet high. Two figures attended a larger one, we supposed of Darius, left foot on Gaumata. With uplifted arm, he reviewed a chain of captive rebel leaders, roped together, hands bound before them. Every figure had a flowing beard

and was bareheaded. All, including the king, wore tunics girdled at the waist. Above the centre was, to us, an unintelligible symbol, as were small plaques upon the walls of the place where stood Darius. Below were three panels, each of three columns, several badly discoloured by water seeping through the rock face and coursing down in fan-shaped spreads. Surrounding the carvings might be, to the initiated, further inscriptions; but perhaps they were merely natural rock.

We gazed our fill and clambered down again, overwhelmed at the immense conception above us until a gay bantam cock, perched upon a boulder, dispelled solemn thoughts by crowing fit to burst himself.

We discussed the vandalism of tourists.

"Anyway," said the D.P. to Rumi, giving one last glance at Bisitun, "no one can take that away from you."

We diverged from our course to visit Sultanabad, once famous for rugs. Weaving was a flourishing industry for centuries, but ninety per cent. of the trade vanished. America did not take kindly to the Sultanabad design. We found unbelievable squalor and wretchedness in the town itself, which was crawling with persistent, half-alive beggars. They were desperate. They cried for alms, pathetic objects of starving misery, men and women wasting to death for want of food, rags falling off their bodies, pinched faces and withered hands livid signs of a pitiable state. Poverty was such that children were picking corn out of dung in the streets. The beggars were for the most part Russian refugees sent there from Meshed and Tabriz.

The most thoughtless act we have ever done was to take out a wad of notes to pay for petrol at the local garage. Around us surged a hundred poor devils to whom even one note would have meant temporary salvation. Yet it would have been a fatal gesture to give them money. Their misery was due to the collapse of the carpet industry,

and to the absence of a wider interest in the welfare of the people, so remote were they from progressive Iran. Whole villages lived on boiled grass. Factories had closed. A branch of the bank, started when business was plentiful and when new factories reared hydra heads about the town, gazed forlornly at a long lease and into empty ledgers. Perhaps the railway would make a difference. While there was life. . . .

We asked our host about it.

"I will tell you," he said. "Houses are falling down for want of strength to repair the mud walls, for want of money to buy timber, and the will to fetch it. In the summer, to avoid the heat and flies and filth, people sleep on the roof, only to fall off from sheer weakness. In the winter they sleep indoors, when, come the rains, the roof falls on them. Tragedy does not describe the lot of these chaps. A couple of years back I knew a foreman in a carpet factory. He was a fine-looking man. We thought well of him. A fortnight ago a beggar asked to see me. I refused him admission. We have to, or life would be impossible. Thousands might otherwise live on the doorstep. This man persisted, and said he had known me a year or so before, and only wished to ask slight assistance. I agreed to hear what he had to say. In came a bundle of rags. I was sure I had never seen him. Hollow, sunken eyes gazed dimly from a wasted face, pleading, as a stray dog pleads, for something, anything.

"'You don't recognize me, Sir,' he said, in a weak and hopeless voice.

"'I have never seen you before in my life,' I replied.

"'I am So-and-So,' said the wreck.

"It was true. He was the foreman, and had been living on next to nothing since his factory closed, until forced by sickness and abject poverty to the dreadful depths he so vividly portrayed. He told his story, saying that as a last resort he had buried his pride and made his

way to me, to ask for something to keep his family from the grave. Anything! Anything! I can hear him now."

We left Sultanabad with this story ringing in our ears. So this was the world, man's inheritance.

Between Sultanabad and Hamadan, green and purple hills, higher than Ben Nevis, guarded rich valleys. Corn-flowers, clusters of gentian, and wild hollyhocks powdered the fields mauve and blue and red for as far as the eye could roam. Foxgloves and Scotch thistle, all a-flower, grew abundantly along the sides of wide roads. Fields of cultured opium poppies proudly reared white heads, a few mauve ones rogue among them. A blaze of mustard flowered amid rippling corn scarce a foot above ground. Grapes and hyacinths gave green and blue repose to tired eyes. We passed a stream where women were washing clothes and bathing, splashing their brown bodies, unheeding the strange eyes that paid them compliment. We went a long way across dull country before we reached the green gardens of Hamadan, Ecbatana of the ancients, where a neighbouring stream brought life to hedgerows and fields. Sheltered by hills, the fertile plain was famous for more than two thousand years. To the south-west, Elvend, Orontes of old, loomed up for thirteen thousand snow-capped feet, silent sentry over miasmal glories.

Herodotus wrote that Deioces, the first great king of Media, founded Ecbatana in the seventh century before Christ.

"Deioces built the massive and strong-walled city now called Ecbatana, the walls being arranged in circles one within the other. The rampart is planned in such a manner that each circle rises higher than the one preceding it by the height merely on the battlements. The nature of the ground, which is a gentle hill, is favorable for carrying out such a design; and, as there are seven circles in all, particular care was taken to have the royal palace and the treasury within

the innermost circle. The circuit of the outer wall is nearly as large as that of the city of Athens. Of this first circle the battlements are white; the second, black; the third, red; the fourth, blue; and the fifth, orange. The battlements of all the circles are decorated in this manner with colors, but those of the two last are incrustated, the one with silver, the other with gold. Such were the palace and the surrounding fortifications which Deioces built for himself; but the rest of the people he ordered to build their houses round about outside the wall."

The glory of the old city vanished. Unlike Persepolis, nothing remained. A river cleaved drab houses and dull shops. On the site of the citadel stood the ruins of the summer residence of the Achæmenian kings. Here were buried Esther the Jewess, beloved of Xerxes, and her uncle Mordecai, although hers was the only tomb to remain. Yet Hamadan once brimmed over with treasure. When Alexander arrived from India on his conquering way, he there deposited more than forty million pounds sterling, guarded by a few thousand Macedonians. Later, he made the city the military metropolis of a mighty new empire.

The people once withdrew to the Fort of the Maiden, to resist a wandering conqueror. Despite her father's great affection for her, the Governor's daughter, fascinated by a glimpse of the besieger, betrayed her kith. The victor, charmed by her beauty, asked the reason.

"For love of you," she replied.

"Fiend," said he. "You shall die."

She was bound face down upon an ass, and driven forth to perish in the desert.

Hamadan was razed to the ground for the last time early in the nineteenth century. Like many another city, dreaming away in peaceful solitude, she ever echoed to the tread of war, even into our own time. We visited

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the cemetery where lay British flesh and blood, close upon two hundred of them, who died in the march of Dunsterforce to the Caspian.

“‘Half a lakh, half a lakh, half a lakh squandered,’” murmured the D.P., who was in Persia during the Great War.

“‘Up to the Persian Hills G.H.Q. wandered,
Lured on by Hambro’s brains
Pushed on by Lubbock’s trains
Up to the Shah’s stony plains,
G.H.Q. wandered.’”

CHAPTER III

CAR TO CAVIARE

"DROWSINESS shall clothe a man with rags," quoted Rumi. "The sloth knows no fatigue save that of idleness."

Admittedly our head had nodded; nodded almost off in fact, lulled by the dull road and by an early start from Hamadan, but we did not expect Rumi to point the fact. We gave a sharp glance to see if he was getting at us, but he was gazing at a prostrate policeman. Woe betide he who was caught literally napping, for any car might contain the person of His Imperial Magnificence. We saw one sentry view us with alarm, and dash into the blockhouse for the rifle he should have had by his side. Some men lay at the foot of the sentry-box, heeding nothing but their dreams, oblivious to any sense of duty; hands in their pockets, sitting, smoking, or both; all in the pay of the Shah. In fairness be it said that at our approach one or two shuffled to their feet.

The road built by the Russians from Hamadan to Kazvin and the Caspian was in good fettle, the best in all Iran. We were able to drive at fifty or sixty miles an hour for long stretches in comparative comfort. Most of the other roads reduced our speed to nearer thirty, leaving us even then apprehensive lest some hidden pot-hole send us through the roof. We motored three hundred miles that day. Enough in England. More than enough in Iran. After long hours of hard going we crossed the plateau, stretching over the rolling road to hills close in their distance. The corn by the wayside was already ripe,

although only a foot or so high. We did not associate mountains with camels, yet many thousands plodded along, six thousand feet above sea-level, carrying unwieldy burdens of grain, sugar beet, household effects; everything, in fact, but the kitchen stove, in sacks woven with broad brown strips.

Rumi told us that once, when driving over this plain, his face became covered with coal dust—source still unexploited. He also said he met a missionary who picked up a lump of gold nearby, but threw it back, with a "Get thee behind me" gesture, refusing to disclose its whereabouts because he said the knowledge might lead to extra wickedness.

As Sultania, and later as one of the Sultanabads (Shahs had a habit of renaming towns, a whim transmitted to the Pahlevi, although no lineal descendant), Kazvin was the capital of Persia. Founded in the third century by Shapur the Second as Djemal Abad, she stood upon a plain widening from a branch of the Taurus mountains. She also claimed to be the ancient Assacia, her many ruins rapidly crumbling. Re-embellished in the thirteenth century, the city was destroyed by an earthquake followed by a drought. Timurlane promptly razed her to the ground in his inimitable manner, although she remained the capital of the empire until Abbas the Great moved to Isfahan.

More recent history, a British cemetery mourned the nearly two hundred dead of Dunsterforce; one unknown soldier appropriately among a Russian, two Frenchmen, and their British and Indian comrades.

Leaving the dirty little town, we soon climbed foothills wrapped in the green blush of June. In winter, Rumi told us, snow topping the north side, the mountain passes did not allow the delectable journey that we were having. The ice froze so many travellers that emergency snow holes were cut by the roadside, for those who had need to seek

obscure security. Come blizzard, wind, or storm, the peasant would stolidly set out upon the hazardous journey from one side of the range to the other, sometimes glad to creep like a rat into a hole; to wait for days, perhaps weeks, before he could even contemplate further progress. To breathe, he kept an open way; for water, there was the snow; for food, what he carried, which may have had to last a long time; for prospect, he had an uncharted and snow-driven waste before and behind, to enlighten his mind. A journey in the winter was an adventure, every year taking toll.

"Many have drunk of the sherbet of eternity in these mountains," Rumi added. "The doctors of the Source of Power had a snow cure for those whose vision vanished in the glare of whiteness. A Feringhee who amassed fame, Sir Malcolm (we presumed he meant Sir John Malcolm, at the court of Feth Ali Shah) proved that the cure was as beautiful to the eyes as contemplation within the Royal Harem. He whose eyes were covered with the shutters of oblivion would bend his head to a large bowl filled with snow. Into this was cast a red-hot stone until the perspiration rose bountifully from the snow. Heavy wraps were then thrown over the bowl and over him who had the misfortune to need such treatment, until by the will of Ali the Beautiful, the glories of Nature would once again be revealed to True Believer and infidel alike."

From the top of the pass literally hundreds of square miles of pasture land on each side stretched into the distance like a panorama from the air. We stopped for luncheon by the side of a rugged gorge, high above a mountain stream. We threw away the wrappings.

"What the devil d'you think you're doing," said the D.P., "littering the countryside with paper?"

We laid our ears back. We had done two-thirds of our three hundred miles that day, along bumpy roads, and were no easy victim.

"We always do it," we said, blushing beneath an iron hide.

"Why?" said the D.P., beginning a tirade on the merits of the Anti-Litter League, during which we racked our brains to think of a reason.

"We belong to the Pro-Litter League," we said haughtily.

"*Pro-Litter?*" said he, scorn in every syllable.

We determined not to wilt.

"After all," we said, "the Anti-Litters are entitled to their opinion. So are we. Our members believe in litter. You don't. Anyhow, we're the people who give you chaps a job. Cut us out and where would you be?"

One sandwich in the last bag went the way of the others, in a defiant gesture, fluttering down the bank to land in a bush. We were lucky not to be sent after it.

On the way to Resht, among bleak hills, we crossed a bridge of unusual design, connecting a high bank on one side to a low level on the other; like half a bridge, a deep culvert at the high end tapering off to smaller culverts at the lower. Stone buildings, set into the face of proud hills, mothered people who existed upon what little the rain conjured to reluctant life behind sheltering mountains.

We drove on until we came to the famous old bridge of Menjil. Time and again, for longer than man can remember, this crossing had been held by a mere handful of bandits, eager and able to quash designs of strong forces bent upon law and order. A new bridge laid to rest the ghosts haunting the old one.

Beyond mountains and gorge, the road made for the Caspian. Yellow broom overhung the cliffs, flood-lighting the green way. Bracken and maidenhair-fern clustered around springs, vying with loftier foliage to breathe dear life over the countryside. Cultivation became gradually more apparent, as the valleys led towards the sea, until fields of rice shone pale green before thatched huts set before a wooden background. Women and men, ankle

deep in water, puddled the young plants. Every now and then a ramshackle dwelling or two, perched on stakes, heralded a small village, lit by oil lamps on rough-hewn tree trunks. Stopping by the roadside for refreshment, a jaunty figure approached, carrying the usual spade over his shoulder, hat cocked on one side above a benign countenance. We wished him the compliments of day and season. Apparently he had been working at the roadside since dawn.

"All men should labour from the opening of the eyelids of the morning," said Rumi, "that they may feather the wings of time." (Cocked Hat gaped at us.) "He drinks the wine of astonishment at your august interest."

A few words of good-bye and we went on our way.

We observed the principal road-mending tool to be the Pahlevi spade, its long handle used to lever back dust swept off by the traffic. The process seemed effective, for carts and lorries and bodies jolted merrily over the rough-and-ready surface, which we found rather much of a good thing.

Alongside trickled a small stream, spanned here and there by a tree felled across the water. Primroses, anemones, cyclamen, and periwinkles embroidered banks heavy with the scent of violets.

Resht, with its impressive barracks, lay not far from Pahlevi, formerly Enzeli, chief Iranian port on the Caspian, its new name that of the Shah's family. The recent activity in name-changing was due to the strong movement in Iran towards purifying the language. Any word with an Arabic flavour about it had to disappear forthwith.

This dirty little town, flaunting a shabby boulevard and a dilapidated bandstand, did not impress us. To begin with, we could not book a room in the hotel; only a bed in the room, costing ten, twenty, or thirty rials, according to the number of room occupants. That was the custom. Who were we to change it? Argue how we

would, we only partly succeeded in procuring better service. We carefully sprayed our beds with Flit, an essential precaution. Dinner cost about one and sixpence a head, against a whisky and soda at half a crown. Word and deed failed us when the food arrived black with flies. Our bath was prepared in the room in which a furnace glowed beneath a great tank. It was hotter outside that bath than in. Other domestic arrangements did not bear description. When occasion called, we were driven to seek the pure air of the garden, under cover of darkness. The climax came when, in this the home of caviare, we were charged seven and sixpence a portion.

That evening we met a Swedish engineer whose firm had a contract to build bridges connecting each side of the town. The cement, he said, was to come from Russia, the metal from Sweden and Germany, and the labour from Iran.

"Would you like to see the fish factory?"

Of course. The next morning, leaving Rumi to discuss ways and means with the hotel proprietor, we found a certain language difficulty. The owner of the factory spoke Russian and Persian. Between us we mustered English, French, Urdu, a little German, and Arabic. We finally discovered Latin to be the only common denominator, which did not help much, for their Latin was not ours.

The fish trade on the shores of the Caspian had been organized scientifically, not on any pretentious scale, nor on one strikingly modern. The fish were bred in protected nurseries, where their habits were carefully studied. The U.S.S.R. held an old concession with permission to establish factories along the coast. The catch was sent to various cold-storage centres to await a ship for Pahlevi, where it was packed. Literally hundreds of thousands of large fish—sturgeon, carp, perch, bream, and salmon—were salted or cold-stored, packed in barrels, and carried by sea to Baku, thence into Russia. Caviare was, of course,

the main luxury trade. When Don Juan and Sir Anthony Shirley sailed the Caspian in the early eighteenth century, they wrote that fishermen caught sturgeon, great fish of which "the smallest weigh as much as twenty or thirty pounds, and the wonder is that no one dare eat of the flesh of these fishes and that they are caught solely for the roe which they bear within them. This may amount in weight to six or seven pounds in each fish, and it is black like a ripe fig. It is very good to eat, and being dried they can keep it for one or two years without its going bad, even as here in Spain we keep quinces and pomegranates."

At the factory, we were handed fleece-lined shoes and a *poshteen* apiece, a long loose coat of sheepskin, fur inwards. When the door of the vast refrigerating plant swung open to admit us, the very smile on our face froze, reacting to a temperature about twelve degrees below zero. How different from the hot June day outside. Within, typical Russians, the sort one saw at the ballet—fur caps, thick coats, and long boots—worked under conditions natural to their own country. Fish from baskets were sent slithering across the floor like curling-stones. A visit to the laboratory and we smiled good-bye.

Russian influence at Pahlevi was strong. We decided to have a Russian bath and found that the attendants were women, who gaily washed and dried us as though we were children. We abandoned ourselves to their kindly and maternal attentions.

The next problem was whether we should go to Tabriz and Ararat. Rumi decided for us.

"Nature did not mean man to spend days" (he looked at us to see how far he could go) "perhaps weeks" (he looked again and knew) "seeking the limitations of the Dead End."

We did not quite get that, but a glance at the map gave us his idea. We cut him short. He had eternity

before him for this sort of thing. We had to get back to do some work.

"Come on, Rumi. What do you suggest?"

"That, to save your time, you rest yourselves upon the couch of patience and allow me to entertain your ears. I will tell you the little I know of the Dead End."

As we had not really the time to wander farther afield, we sat back and listened.

"Tabriz knows not the alarms of sickness," he began. "Built on the ground of enlightenment, she bears the word *tab*, or fever, and *riz*, which means fled. So healthy was the climate in olden days that all sufferers recovered when they breathed her air. By aid of the fleet foot of pleasing memory, we know that the city was the ancient Tauris of the Medes, later named Tabriz. Nearly four hundred years ago a great shaking of the earth brought half of the town to the knees of sorrow, when she lost much of her heritage. Later, those who lived in Turkey conquered the city, but Abbas the Shah drove them thence. The earth-shaking destroyed much of her past history. The mountain stream, which found ecstasy as it coursed into the Lake of Content, vanished in the Well of Loneliness, so deep as to be indescribable. One of the oldest houses fell down until the walls lay flat, and the rooms returned to the earth whence they were fashioned. Within the ruins was buried a suit of armour which carried a story that we Persians tell father to son. Would you like to hear it?"

We nodded.

Rumi drew his feet under the chair and sat forward, strangely excited. His face caught the light from an oil lamp in the corner. Animation shone in eyes so often in open repose.

"A Crown Prince of Persia, called Husein Ali Khan, was playing for fish with the rod of purpose. He drew in his line, found nothing thereon, and cast again with the sigh of infinite patience. Still he caught nothing.

"Since early dawn he had fished the lake. Behind, along the narrow path, wound a stream of pilgrims, bound for the sacred shrine. He exchanged many a jest with the passers-by, for they all knew him to be the eldest son of the Monarch of Sultans and Sovereigns. The young ones laughed the laugh of the impetuous, and envied him as he sat there in his comfortable, everyday clothes, fishing; whilst they had perforce to dress in tight, unfamiliar silks and satins, to make obeisance. The old ones shook their heads. The royal family was bound to come to grief sooner or later. Never did they trouble to offer prayers to Allah, even on this holiest of all holy days. One of the pilgrims, an old retainer, stopped and asked if His Majesty would be at the place of worship. The lad laughed.

"'No, indeed,' he said. 'Our family does not worship. Why should we? We are strong enough to rule as we like, and we have everything we want, without bowing to the bones of any saint. My father has gone to-day to shoot that wolf which has been plaguing our flocks near Kashan. He has taken my second brother with him. Wait! At last I have caught something.'

"He wound in his line with difficulty, expecting to see a large and handsome fish struggling on the relentless hook of indefinite fate. But no. All that met his disappointed gaze was a fat wriggling reptile. So enraged was he that he snatched his catch roughly off the hook, and flung it into the well behind him.

"The passers-by tarried a moment.

"'Look you,' said Husein to one of them. 'This is no fish that I have caught, but the Devil himself!'

"The peasant gazed into the well for some moments before he answered gravely.

"'Aye, your Royal Highness. Never have I seen the fellow to this one. See! It has nine holes on each side of the mouth. No good can come of such a catch, mark my words. On a holy day too. Best throw it back into

the lake and let it be carried downstream into a country other than thy father's.'

"The young prince gave the coarse laugh of inconsequence. He left the reptile in the well, and mounting his pony, galloped up the rocky homeward path.

"A few weeks later he set off with a band of followers to prove his valour in the war against the Afghans. The King was ageing rapidly, and the time was not far distant when his son would have to rule over the fearless and headstrong tribes.

"For some months he forgot everything save joy of fighting and lust of killing. He gloried in his tireless young strength. One day curious rumours reached the camp, how a great beast terrorized the countryside near Tabriz. Knowing the peasant's love of exaggeration, Husein paid no heed to the tales, until flying on the wings of haste came a runner from the King.

" 'Tell the Crown Prince to return quickly,' he said 'Threatening my lands and my people is a terrible creature, against which all my warriors are powerless. It is like a serpent, and has nine holes on either side of the mouth.'

"This gave Husein to think. The loathsome reptile he had thrown into the well also had nine holes on either side. But how had this thing come to pass? It measured but a few inches. Had it grown so large? Forthwith, he set off to his father, without many regrets. Killing men held a certain sameness, he had discovered, and all sports palled after a while. This promised to be different, with the spice of adventure dear to every young man's heart. After days of travelling, the little band reached the foot of the hills, and began a laborious ascent up the pathway, until at last they reached the gap at Qaraga. Here they halted to take breath. Husein turned his eyes towards the mountains. He gazed earnestly for a few minutes, then called his captain to him.

"'Look,' he said. 'What think you?' Has not the hill changed shape? These rounded curves and terraces where once were rocky crags; what manner of thing may this be?"

"The captain made no answer, for up came a runner, heralded by the jingling of the bells on his staff.

"*'Salaam 'aleikum*, your Royal Highness,' he said, bowing to the ground and pouring a stream of dust upon his head. 'Greetings from His Majesty thy father. He bids thee come quickly. The monster bringeth destruction everywhere. Our crops are laid low. Our houses are broken down. Our cattle and our maidens have been sacrificed to the lust of It-of-the-Nine-Holes. See! Yonder it lies, three times encircling the hill, and yet its great length allows jaws and tail to rove where they will.'

"Husein saw it was indeed so. The rounded curves about the hill were not the efforts of man, but verily the coils of the Devil himself, who lay there defying all comers. The reptile Husein had cast from him had burst the bounds of the well, and was lord of all it surveyed. Husein strode to his horse, and flung himself into the saddle. He galloped along the lakeside, and up the mountain path, where his father was descending to meet him.

"'Greetings, my son,' cried the old King. 'Well come thou art indeed. Go thou forth and do thine utmost.'

"Without more ado, the prince set spurs to his horse. Those below listened to the sounds of combat. When day was done, and the moon rose above the snow peak, he returned, dusty, and weary unto death.

"'Alas, my father, what can we do? Every time one piece of the body is severed from the rest, it adheres again more quickly than I can recover to deliver another blow.'

"Husein flung himself to the ground and stared

moodily into the valley. A trusted and privileged henchman sat down beside him.

"'Your Royal Highness,' he said. 'I know that heretofore neither thou, nor His Imperial and Divine Majesty, nor any of thy family has paid homage to the saints. But now that thou art at thy wits' end how to defeat this monster, why not consult the Sage of Tabriz? He can do thee no harm. None need know that thou hast gone. Besides, did not the monster live for many months in the well nigh unto his cave?'"

"For some moments Husein communed within himself. At last he stood up.

"'You are right,' he said simply. 'I go now. Come with me.'"

"Together they strode down the hill, weary as they were, and reached the cave. The moon was high, throwing quaint shadows upon the rough-hewn steps. The Sage was awake, and sat cross-legged before a small fire enclosed within blackened stones, reading aloud to himself from a holy book, with moon for lamp. The prince bent his head to enter. For many hours they talked. Not until daylight did he emerge. Instead of returning whence he came, he circled the lake to the bazaar and sought a maker of swords.

"Several hours he spent with him, closeted in the shop, examining and testing, explaining and demonstrating. At last, as the sun lost its strength, he came forth, followed by a boy bearing a bulky parcel wrapped in a padded quilt of faded scarlet.

"The Crown Prince returned to his father's palace, and fell into a deep sleep. Next morning he awoke and called his young men to him. After listening to his instructions, they all girded on their armour and ascended the hill where the head of the monster lay. With noise and laughter they began to tease it, skilfully pricking with sword points, and leaping back out of range. Gradually

they lured it down the hill towards the spot where the stream entered the lake. There stood Husein, clad in shining new mail of a special design.

"Nearer and nearer drew his men, slashing and cutting more boldly, so that pieces of the body continually fell to the ground. In less time than it takes to tell, however, they joined again to the whole. The Prince then took a hand. Baiting the monster as did his companions, he backed inch by inch into the stream where it flowed swiftly over the pebbles. When he reached the centre of the water, he fought in grim earnest. Several times the monster wound about Husein's mail-clad form, only to fling itself away with a roar of pain. Slash, slash, went the sword, cutting from the slimy body great slices, which did not join up again. They could not, for the swift-flowing river bore them rapidly down to the lake, before the writhing coils could move forward. The monster thrashed from side to side in rage, until little could be seen but Husein's sword arm, laying about with right good will.

"The spectators clung to each other. Surely the young princeling would be killed. As they looked, the struggles of the monster grew weaker. When its movements ceased, Husein disentangled himself from the inert flesh, and knelt before the King.

" 'My son, my son!' cried his father, voice trembling with emotion. 'Verily hast thou conquered the Devil himself. Tell me how thou didst accomplish so valiant a deed.'

" ' 'Tis not I thou hast to thank, O my father,' replied the young man. 'It is the Sage of Tabriz, whom I visited last night. He told me to fashion this suit of mail. See, thin blades of steel project from the armouring. All I had to do was to stand in the stream. When the monster wound round me, pieces of its flesh were cut off by the blades, and the water carried them down-stream before they could join the body again. Thus it died.'

"The Prince ended simply, and would brook no further congratulation. Straightway he changed into a gala dress of silk and velvet. Taking an offering of fruit and sweetmeats, he mounted his horse and galloped off to offer his thanks to the Sage, and to receive his blessing."

Rumi looked round, as though challenging us to disbelieve his tale. We preserved a discreet silence.

"Was it not at Tabriz that the Crown Prince used to be proclaimed?" we asked.

"You speak with the voice of learning," approved Rumi. "At the end of May every year the custom and pleasure of the King of Kings was to invest the Crown Prince with an honourable dress, to show the people that he was still in royal favour; a necessary gesture in those times. The ceremony took place in a wooded valley nestling among stark hills, whither the populace rode, mounting the stirrup of activity to the saddle of accomplishment. Cavalry gave a display, until the Source of Majesty himself walked to the royal tent pitched upon a lawn, where he took his place, flanked by his sons in strict order of precedence. Without their father's permission they would scarcely dare so much as to look up. The courtiers approached, none nearer than ten yards. The poet-laureate would then deliver a long congratulatory oration, rivers of ink running through meadows of paper to create an easy channel for his thoughts."

Rumi paused.

"Please go on," we said.

"The mosque at Tabriz was built in the twelfth century, and covered inside and out by highly coloured tiles lettered in gold, with a frieze of white characters bountifully illumined in green and gold. The royal palace was richly decorated with paintings and mirrors, and lit through stained-glass windows. Nearby, the massive walls of the mosque of Sultan Kazan were lined with the marble for which the town is famed. A few miles south is Maraghan, girt by

a range of hills reputed to have been levelled by Hulagu, whereon to build his observatory. Not far off, the Royal Sea, although fed by fourteen rivers, never grows larger, due to evaporation. To the north-west is Khoi, of which the walls were said to be like the Biblical drawings of Jericho. The plain round about is abundant with corn, garden produce, and chenar trees. Farther off is Makoo in the mountains, where an immense cavern, more than three hundred yards wide and two hundred deep, said to be filled with royal treasures, has ever eluded the staircase of curiosity. Nearby is Mount Ararat, on the border. I have finished," said Rumi, suddenly.

CHAPTER IV

CAVIARE TO CAPITAL

As we were about to leave Pahlevi, a youth from the hotel produced a staggering bill for our baths of the night before. It was about the price of a night's lodging, and three times that of dinner. We were emphatic in our refusal to pay.

"Fancy trying to sting us five bob for a bath in a smoking inferno," said the D.P.

"Sting us? What is sting us?" questioned Rumi. "What does Your Excellence mean? I see no scorpions here."

"My dear Rumi, in English we have a slang expression for anyone who tries to make us pay too much for something, or who borrows money. Suppose a friend asked you for five hundred *tomans*, we would say that he had stung you, or touched you."

"Touched?"

"Same thing as stung."

Leaving Pahlevi for Chalus, the road for the first fifty miles was fair, a country lane bordered by low hedges and a few trees—not yet properly surveyed, although attempts were being made to straighten some of the bends. Row upon row of women puddled rice in the fields, short pants reaching to their knees below a full skirt tucked out of reach of the water. In the abundant life all around, even the telegraph poles took root and sprouted merrily about the wires. Everywhere, except in the tea-houses, the peasants

showed energy. Men and women plodded along, load on back, vying with donkeys, mules, ponies, camels, and even carts. Some, with an air of affluence, rode caparisoned horses. Peasants hauled tree trunks too large for the smaller donkeys, or too few for the heavier beasts.

Some way from Resht the road ran for more than a hundred miles along a marine drive bordering the Caspian, the tidal rise and fall being nil. We drove between cowslips and periwinkles in full flower, and convolvulus choking wild hedgerows vaguely guarding the rambling way. Hibiscus bushes blushed scarlet amid tea and rice washed by mountain water. A strange sight, rice within a few yards of the sea. A stork flew overhead, to stand proudly on one leg upon its nest, above the thatched dwelling of a large family unaware of the western omen. A snake wound swiftly away. Golden oriole, yellow-hammer, bee-eater, roller, and hoopoe flew beside the car, wings busy in the sun. A tortoise slowly crossed the road. The sight struck a chord in Rumi's memory.

"Do you know the story of the scorpion and the tortoise?" he began gravely, not waiting for a reply. "They went on a journey together, and came to a stream over which the tortoise, out of a heart bounteous with good fellowship, agreed to carry the scorpion. In mid-stream, however, the scorpion tried to sting his steed with his tail. The tortoise was angry, and, when safely ashore, indignantly asked the reason for such base ingratitude, saying that but for God's forethought in endowing him with armour he would have been killed.

"I am sorry," apologized the scorpion. 'Alas, I cannot help it. I was born thus. My nature is to sting everybody I touch.'"

So that was why Rumi had been so quiet! Our conversation as we were leaving Pahlevi had not been wasted on our friend. We contemplated the sea in silence.

Seventy miles west of Chalus, linked by the coastal road, we came upon hot sulphur springs. Little use had hitherto been made of the medicinal properties of the waters, until the Shah's Five Year Plan to develop the coast embraced a large hydro and spa, built on the generous scale ever associated with Iran.

"A spa?" asked Rumi. "Is not that a haven where people drink their bath water?"

We came to an obscure village, which he told us was Ab-i-Garm. But where was the great hotel of which we had heard so much? We drove on for a couple of miles. Suddenly we saw a veritable palace.

To credit Iran with an eye only for size would be to label her Victorian, for her dignity and beauty have ever been in the grand manner. When her sons conceived a plan, at least they achieved a landscape setting, as became a nation of poesy and romance. A Persian garden always has running water. Even Timurlane surrounded his pyramids of skulls with flower-bordered streams, which brought such fame to his capital city that her name, Samarkand, remained a melody to poets for all time.

We mounted the spacious hotel drive, overlooking mile upon mile of gardens, sweeping down to the Caspian where white horses rode in the wind. On both sides of the drive stood fountains, one with girl figures diving into the water, the other with boys'. But the enchantment of distance slowly lost hold in domestic detail. Splendour of vast enterprise and beauty sank all too soon in the tragedy of drainage and dirt. The grace of fine design vanished at close quarters, offensive to eye and nose alike. The pretentious front entrance of the hotel was locked. We tried the back with more success. After washing our hands in a dirty little tin bowl, under sanitary conditions best not described, we suffered an oily and execrable luncheon, badly served; and were not sorry to continue on our way. The road hugged the sea as far as Chalus, over

dozens of bridges of all shapes and sizes, built to last for centuries, and intended to keep the route open despite the elements sheeting from the mountain tops. A fine avenue of trees shaded the whole way to Chalus, where we stayed in the most comfortable of all hotels in Iran.

Upon the Shah's own land, near his hunting-box and overlooking the sea, the hotel was built with the idea of turning his palaces into paying propositions. He argued that he needed palaces here and there to which he could resort at whim. Why maintain them from the privy purse? Let government keep them up. When he wished to use them, he would close them to the public. Simple. We found the Chalus hotel in charge of a European manager, who took care to see that everything was at least clean. It was the first time we had met public comfort, and at ten shillings a night for a large bedroom and bathroom.

We strolled along the shore to watch people bathing. A good Bateman picture, we thought, would be "the girl who wore a bathing dress on the shores of the Caspian."

"We are taught to swim in the water like fishes, and to fly in the air like birds, when we do not yet know how to live upon the earth," meditated Rumi. "But come, Sir P, let us unroll the carpet of feasting. Unseal the wine jar of intoxication. On with the dance, I think you say."

Our mood agreed with his, but champagne cost three guineas a cork, and at that price was out of the question. Moreover, a bottle of gin sat in splendid isolation in a glass case.

"Such as your grandfather never saw in a dream," ventured Rumi.

We saw it in a dream all right, but alas, no nearer.

Since leaving Baghdad, we had covered about a thousand

miles. Damage to the cars, considering we had tried them high, was not heavy: six punctures, two split tyres, one brake-rod twice broken, one fan-blade sheered off because the driver put an oil tin in the way, and one front spring. A horn twice refused to function, and one of the cars lost the oil supply in its hydraulic brake system.

Given time, we could have motored thousands of miles from the Caspian to Cape Comorin over a growing network of roads. We thought the way through the Chalus Gorge, over the Elburz range, surely had no equal; built for more than a hundred miles at a cost of over a million sterling, linking the Shah's estates to his capital. Hitherto, farm produce from the coast had to skirt the mountains, either via Resht over the Manjil Pass to Kazvin, or to the East. Experts considered the direct route too expensive and difficult to build, but Riza brooked no refusal. Throughout its grand and rugged length steel telegraph posts pointed the new road. Upon the uplands, flocks grazed in rich pastures, gay with wild hollyhocks, blue anchusa, purple orchis, and a hundred other blooms. The only signs of habitation were stone shelters for shepherds and road-menders, for it was one thing to build the road and another to keep it up. We came across gangs of workmen every fifty kilometres. Since the rate of pay was small, and they seldom got it, the cost to the state was negligible. The road had been revetted above and below, although when the last winter storms howled among the mountains, great boulders and coursing torrents gave the engineers plenty to do.

Turning south from the coast, we followed the valley of the Chalus River through forty miles of dusty, wooded hills, and entered the narrow gorge winding between rocks thirty yards apart, sheer cliffs making the sides appear even closer. Every turn and bend disclosed a view finer than the last. Quite early on, the road had been cut through a hill, small caves and stalactites on one side, and towering

cliffs on the other, the verges of the stream shrouded by overhanging rock. We passed the Seven Pillars of Wisdom, towering heights left by blasting. Into the open again, we climbed over a hilltop, gay with Scotch thistles and twin waterfalls of surpassing beauty. The stream bed had been built up with boulders. Irises, anemones, and yellow rock-roses clung to the soil-less crannies.

Amid the green shade of trees and pasture, among glades dancing with rushing water, we mounted bare hills scowling above slow road and rapid stream. Mile upon mile of beauty greeted our eye, until the road left the gorge and wound to the pass itself; buttercups and daisies, oleanders, and a carpet of mauve decking the faces of the hills. Summer snow, cleft by cascade and waterfall, sprinkled the cloud-capped heights, flashing white in their distance; in places bordered by sheer precipices falling thousands of feet.

"A drop all the way to eternity," murmured Rumi.

We agreed with him, although he upset our peace of mind by his flippant comment. We were only too aware that to sideslip would mean a long journey before we came to rest. We passed through a cloud, every minute expecting a recklessly driven car to hurtle round a bend and push us over the edge of the wet road. We heard later that a tunnel would soon save seventeen kilometres of this climb and ensure the road open all the year round.

The D.P. snowballed us near the top, a pastime we enjoyed until we were hit in the back of the neck.

Twisting and turning we reached the snowline, and this in the midst of summer amid an endless panorama of superb scenery, near and distant, high and low. The descent the other side of the pass was shorter, since Teheran was four thousand feet up. During the whole of our journey of a hundred odd miles, we saw no policemen—extraordinary for Iran. We came upon two lots of four

horses abreast, drawing carts, a satisfying sight in mechanical days. We joined the main road at Karaj. Occasional villages nestled beside the streams and clung to steep terraces.

The Elburz mountains, corner stone of the Roof of the World, once separated Hyrcania from ancient Media. Snow-crowned Demavend, regally symbolic of the white-haired Shah himself, stood sentinel over his capital city. There was once a town called Demavend, where ruled a Persian tyrant. Two serpents, growing from his shoulders, demanded to be fed every day with human brains. At last a youth volunteered to kill him. This accomplished, he lit a beacon at the summit of the mountain's nineteen thousand feet, to tell the world. After sunset we saw the snow gleam a soft pink bloom; afterglow, they say, of that ancient bonfire.

"Behold the City of the Shadow of God," said Rumi, pointing to Teheran. "The Footstool of the King of Kings. Sir P must set foot in the stirrup of impatience, and goad himself with the spur of novelty. The sand of the desert is lightly blown away by a breath. How much more lightly is the fortune of man swayed by him who requires the head to bow in tribute? He who speeds to audience with the Mount of Splendour is honoured. His face shall be whitened and his consequence increased. Long may he bask in the sunshine of the Stupendous Presence."

The idea of the D.P.'s face blanching tickled us. A smartly-turned-out policeman stopped the car. Nonchalantly, we waved the crested envelope. He read the letter, the right way up, took a note of its number and of our names, and allowed us to proceed in peace.

We were on the right road to Gulaheq, the summer resort a thousand feet or so above Teheran, when we were diverted by a stupid peasant boy. He gaily sent us out of our way across a rough track, bumping and bouncing

enough to make us all but burst with fury. Several times we found the Iranians maddening in the way they directed us, quite glibly, without in the least knowing where we wanted to go.

We finally arrived.

"Say it with flowers" in Iran as elsewhere. The first thing we noticed when we entered the drawing-room was a wide deep bowl, in which grew over a hundred Madonna lilies and clusters of white, pink, and crimson carnations. An Iranian diplomat's eye for beauty conceived this superb token of admiration, that it might remain for months to cherish his charming thought. Like the age-old petitions to Persian royalty, those flowers seemed to say: "May I be your sacrifice?"

We strolled in the orchard among cherry trees bowed to the ground with fruit, while our host told us of an American girl who had visited them the week before. Unwilling to shock the old Iranian family retainers, she decided to put away her own silken pyjamas each morning. One day she forgot. Dashing up to her room, she met the house-boy.

"It's all right, *khanum*," he said. "I have taken the pyjamas back to the young gentleman's room for you!"

Lightning and thunder about Giant Demavend shattered the lowering skies. We looked at the storm raging round the mountains over which we had just passed. The cloud above us burst. We hurried in from tennis.

"That storm," said our host the next day, "swept away several bridges which cannot be repaired for months. Had you been caught, you would have found yourself in no end of a mess."

We enquired about Rey.

"Nothing now remains of what was once the capital of a great empire," said Rumi. "Rey, the Rhages of Tobit,

where Alexander rested for five days after pursuing Darius, is said to be the birthplace of Haroun-ar-Rashid and a favourite resort of his. It was ever a low-lying and unhealthy town. A poet of Qum once met the Angel of Death, a guileful, yet white-faced Excellence.

“‘Where art thou going?’ demanded he.

“‘Flying with speed,’ said the Angel, ‘from the unwholesome morning dews of the city of Rey.’”

“Destiny, Kismet, what you will, there is another tale like that,” continued Rumi, “if you will allow the fancy of imagination to play upon the couch of anticipation.”

We nodded.

“Our country has often been overwhelmed by the rule of passionate Shahs,” he went on. “One of them from among the beauties of Persia built Teheran for himself and for those he had brought into the world.

“It happened that two men in the new city were one day dragging the anchor of reflection along the floor of the sea of friendship when they met the Angel of Death. At sight of him, one of the two men screamed in horror and fled, saying that he must depart from Teheran for Rey at once or he would surely die. The other invited the Angel to drink of the sherbet of contemplation at a nearby café.

“‘I am sorry,’ said the Angel, in a hollow voice, ‘but I have a professional appointment at Rey.’”

“In the ninth century the city was at the height of culture. Fifteen thousand caravanserais were then too few to house the rich visitors. Early in the nineteenth century the walls had six towers and six gates, fortified with cannon and inlaid with pictured tiles. They too have gone, except at the Abdul Azim Gate.”

Without Demavend and the ruins of Rey, Teheran would lose much of her picturesque interest. She leapt into prominence under Agha Muhammad Shah, who made

the city his capital because it was the pivot of the plains where dwelt his own tribes. If he lived farther afield, he argued, control would be so distant that local governors might be tempted to corrupt those over whom they held sway. He built ramparts round the main square, and a drawbridge spanning the moat. Above the Royal Palace, named the Ark, stood a tower from which he and his cronies delighted in the miseries of those of his dangling subjects who had incurred his displeasure.

During the war a pilot, flying a D.H.9A, landed his general in the middle of this same square, to the consternation of everybody, including the general.

Rumi took us to the flat-roofed Palace of the Sun, built of mud bricks.

"In olden days," he said, "this palace tickled the imagination, whensoever the Shah shed the light of his countenance upon the dust of the earth."

Our next insight into the culture of old Persia was the Gulestan Palace in the Garden of Roses. Goldfish swam in a pool beneath a sparkling fountain. Beyond the marble hall and a chamber of mirrors, a staircase led to the throne-room, hung with gay chandeliers, each of a different colour. Around the walls stood cabinets filled with priceless treasures; jewelled swords and scabbards, aigrettes, Chinese lacquer work, vases, gold and silver plate, cut glass, jade, chain armour, and a thousand more. Old carpets, each finer than the last, patterned the floor. The famous peacock throne of the King of Kings, studded with emeralds and rubies, was flanked by two others. Said to have cost more than ninety thousand pounds, the original throne stood on four pillars, each surmounted by a golden peacock encrusted with jewels. There the Imperial Clay was wont to be seated in all magnificence, surrounded by his courtiers. When Nadir Shah conquered Delhi, he appropriated the jewels of the Great Moghuls, brought

them to Persia, and wove them into a tent, a canopy, and a throne.

A second room was decorated with crystal, Russian glass, English chandeliers, and fine wall mirrors painted with birds and flowers.

We descended to see yet another throne, in massive marble, whereon the common people might gaze from a distance upon their gracious ruler. In the centre of the throne a fountain played about the feet of Divine Right.

"At one time," said Rumi, "flowering bushes exuded sweet scent that had never looked upon dust, watered by a spring that had never been vexed by a cold blast, when Life was Love and the nightingale warbled her enchanting note, and rent the thin veil of the rosebud and the rose, so that they intoxicated the senses and made the heart drunk."

The tower of Toghnîl nearby, built of round fluted white columns, simple to a degree, once crowned with a blue-tiled dome, commemorated the last of the Seljuk monarchs.

Modern Teheran was making rapid progress. Fine buildings, wide roads, and well-ordered avenues of a youthful splendour were not unlike London before Mr. Hore Belisha turned her streets into orange groves.

Cabarets vied one with the other to provide bright entertainment. At first, two artistes delighted an enthusiastic audience. When tastes became jaded, six pirouetted before the bored gaze of the clientele. Then twelve fairies from Central Europe arrived to grace the floor of yet a third restaurant, which thus gained a temporary monopoly—a mere nothing compared with one Shah, who, after a visit to England, sought to buy the entire Gaiety chorus. Defeated in his lavish project, he ordained that the women of Persia must wear ballet dresses in imitation. We saw some of these, degenerated to a narrow frill around

the waist instead of the original regulation three hands' breadth. Beneath, long black drawers descended to the ankle.

The Frenchman of the East was living up to his name. All night long, when we were there, the cabarets, adorned by those who could afford to pay the stiff prices, illuminated the gardens of Stamboul Street and Balizar Street, beneath palms and apricot trees. The prime entertainment was caviare from the Caspian at "three bob a nob," with a whisky and soda at the same price. A dance tune pulsated as a couple took the floor, under lights kindly shining. Iranians and Europeans both contributed their mite to the evening's fun, among as cosmopolitan a crowd as was possible to gather. One of the ex-royal family ran the most fashionable cabaret. Hungarian artistes seemed to provide the best part of the shows, with a few Poles and a Frenchman or two. They may not have been exactly the John Tiller girls, but theirs was a life of action and adventure, amid more difficulty than we cared to contemplate. On through the night went the fun, in French and English, humour slightly strained by the dapper little *compère* who filled a weird bill. The joke of the moment was that some Moslems thought Russians half-way towards becoming Moslems because their creed said, "There is no god." To become a Moslem they had but to add, "except Allah!"

One evening when we were there we saw a young reveller who had foolishly drunk too much *araq*. Feeling exceedingly volcanic, he excused himself, and wandered outside. The cold air only made him worse. The trouble was that he thought he was still inside, saw a window, rushed to it with all speed, thrust his head through, and was violently sick on the very dance floor he had just left!

On the score of economy the town lights dimmed at four in the morning, but those who catered for Teheran's night life were not so easily defeated. Petrol lamps

flared over the last stages of the evening's amusement, until the droshkies took home the bits and pieces. Not until daybreak did the cabarets end.

"Gaiety as old as time and as young as the passing moment," was Rumi's dry comment. "We have a saying that perfect music is made by a *tar*, a drum, a human voice, and a dancer, Mistress of the Night."

The next morning he came to take us shopping, carrying a satchel which he said was his *kief*.

"This," he said, "you English call a despatch bag. In Iran we carry it in public places to add a measure of importance to our humility. The beloved *kief* lends an air of dignity, of respectability, although it may be as empty as the mind of a woman."

We entered a shop to buy some films, and saw in the window a card on which was pencilled "Optimist and Spectacular Maker." Outside, we ran into a soldier wearing a medal. We asked how he had earned it.

"For bravery, Sir," came the reply; like the old guide at Stirling Castle who announced that he was one of the 1914 heroes!

We saw Teheran as a hive of industry, representatives from many countries vying one with the other to secure contracts for anything from a lighthouse to a cotton mill. A steel bridge? Did His Majesty need a packing factory? Textile machinery? An electric light plant? The little matter of the railway: did he want engines or rails? A contract for part of the line? Perhaps a ginning factory? And so on. The servilities of the commercial community afforded much local amusement. The Swedes were winning the race in our time, but the British and the Germans, the French, the Italians, and the Russians were not easily outdone. Over ten thousand Russians lived in Teheran alone, where their language was widely spoken. They owned many of the shops and cafés, exerting considerable influence upon the city. We met what was left of

one of these Russian merchants, who had just suffered an irreparable loss on his way to the bank.

"All my money has gone," he shrieked. "The filthy thief has ruined me. Truly has it been said, 'if your friend has been to Mecca, trust him not. If he has been there twice, avoid him. If he has made the pilgrimage three times, flee from him as from Satan himself.' My companion called himself Haji, for he had five times visited Mecca, and yet I trusted him. Ayee! What shall I do?"

Cursing long and loud, he repeated the story to those who gathered round. On his way to the bank with the equivalent of about two thousand pounds, he had trouble with his car. Taking off his coat, the money in a pocket, he proceeded to make repairs. Those who lived by their wits saw to the rest. Rumi had no sympathy.

"May his mother be childless of him," he said. "He has drunk deep of the cup of vanity. When its contents passed the lip of expectation, his heart overflowed with arrogance, and his bowels with ambition. Fate now but empties what she filled."

The oriental outlook on matters of business was naïve to say the least of it. An insurance broker told us that one day a Jew, in all seriousness, entered the office to insure his premises against fire. The broker asked him from what date he wished to insure.

"From yesterday," said the man. "That was when I had the fire."

In contrast, a hat manufacturer from Teheran visited a factory in England during the luncheon hour. When the return hooter sounded, he saw the employees running to their work.

"Tell me," he said, "where can I get a hooter which will make my men do that?"

Recently an eminent author interviewed some Iranian journalists. He talked to them long and earnestly, flattered by their responsive attitude. At the end he invited

questions. To his surprise, nobody had anything to say. There was a good reason. Nobody understood the language he spoke!

Iranians are a thrifty race. We heard tell of a Teheran cinema where a boy was paid to go round every night after the last performance and pick up the cigarette ends, which were sold as tobacco the next day in the booth at the entrance.

CHAPTER V

THE HALF THE WORLD

FROM Teheran, open country, affording poor grazing, bestrode the road to Qum. Gaunt hills interrupted the horizon. Rumi drew our attention to a large salt lake on the left.

"That harmonious lake came through the astuity of a Vizier," he said. "In the majesty of sublime endeavour he flooded the low-lying country by cutting the river bank, thus closing the existing pass, so that the True Believer had to go through his lands, and pay for the privilege. That Vizier lived long to enjoy the happy fruits of everlasting taxation."

Rumi ended with a note of envy in his voice.

We looked at the lake and then at him. "Astuity to enjoy the happy fruits of everlasting taxation" was the idea all right. Yet what of the poor creatures who had to submit to this tyranny? They not only saw their fields flooded, but their livelihood gone, and an extra tax thrust upon them.

"He is long since dead," continued Rumi. "The world is but a caravanseraï, where each man occupies his chamber for a season. A great countryman of yours, Sir McNeill, once rode the two hundred and sixty miles from Teheran to Isfahan in three days, all on one horse. Another time he took post horses from Teheran to Tabriz in four days, a hundred miles each day. But by the Beard of the Prophet an English sergeant beat him. On the wings of time he made the same journey in seventy-two hours."

We, who expected to reach Isfahan before nightfall, envied neither the gallant Sir John McNeill nor the sergeant their rides. Until quite lately the journey was no sinecure, yet what was once considered impassable country had at last opened to the call of civilization. The wide road was endowed with new Irish bridges rubbing shoulders with the ruins of olden days: the Bridge of the Daughter and Fatima's Shrine at Qum.

Qum has been called the City of Undertakers because of the fanatical religious observances of the inhabitants. There lay Shah Sefi, hard by Abbas the Second who loaded Fatima's tomb with costly tributes. Burial in the precincts was held to carry favour into the hereafter, according as the spirit of give smote the devotee and the spirit of take inspired the incumbent. No wonder the dome was of gold leaf, maintained in lavish magnificence. Yet the price of Paradise was not enough to stop rats from feeding voraciously upon the pious bodies as fast as they were laid to what they deemed their last rest.

The way to Isfahan followed the same monotony, a few villages and police posts alternating with road-menders to afford what little variety there was. We passed a caravanserai and a river before drawing brake at Kashan for passport scrutiny.

"We have an old invective," said Rumi, looking hard at the police official beside the car. "'May you be stung by a scorpion of Kashan,' because the district was noted for a particularly virulent breed. But they are said not to touch" (he looked at us a trifle quizzically, shades of the Caspian upon him) "a stranger, only the poor local."

Most of the rest of the two hundred and fifty miles was brown, waste land, save for fair villages where the road was bordered by pigeon towers, as wrote the traveller and raconteur Ibn Batuta. We jogged on for mile upon mile. Darkness fell. We still jogged on, uncomfortably dozing, cold and crumpled.

"Isfahan!" suddenly exclaimed Ferdinand.

We shook ourselves and blinked at a blaze of lights. Once more we displayed our passports. Once more we denied the practice of any profession. Once more we drove on. Stiff and tired, we entered a house where every inch spelt comfort, and we sank thankfully into bed.

The next day a riot of colour drew our eyes to the Maidan-i-Shah, surrounded by wondrous buildings of an historic interest only equalled by their charm. Behind mysterious domed entrances lay the bazaars; making and selling all manner of slender tallow candles, pottery, carpets, oil from opium seeds, and practising a hundred other crafts.

Before luncheon we called upon the Governor, who invited us to dine that evening. The guest of honour was the chief of a neighbouring state. Upon his entry the band struck up an air which the Iranians took to be the visitor's national anthem. They stood stiffly to attention. The music was the closing bars of an aria from *Madame Butterfly*.

During a lull in the conversation, the D.P. turned to us.

"I shall be home in time for the boat race next year," he said.

Rumi, thinking to make the conversation go with a swing, and to air his knowledge of English, came in with:

"Who carried their oars, this year, Sir P? Eton or Harrow?"

Our fit of choking saved the day. Everyone hit us on the back and forgot the subject.

The Governor was a genial host who told us much about the city. Isfahan was created the capital of Persia by Shah Abbas, his mosques and palaces show-places of Iran, second only to Persepolis. The city was perhaps Aspa, the ancient Hecatompylos, the City of a Hundred Gates. Besides Persians, there lived a heterogeneous collection of French Capuchins, Portuguese Augustinians, Italian Carmelites, servants of the Dutch and English East India

Companies, and Armenians. So many skilled scientists suckled at the breast of Isfahan that she became known as the Half the World. Chardin, in the seventeenth century, described splendour of which much had disappeared two hundred years later. Her size at that time may be gauged from a writer who compared her with Paris, when the houses were "so high that you would swear they were all built for astrologers." Of ten gates, one was the Gate of the Deaf, for upon the outskirts lived deaf people; another, the Gate of Prosperity. Both have since been lost in crumbled time.

The golden age of the city centred round the reign of Shah Abbas, the most powerful prince of the Suffavean dynasty, contemporary with Queen Elizabeth of England. When he captured Laer and Ormuz, he forsook Kazvin and Sultania, and removed his capital to Isfahan. He sent to China for instructors in porcelain making, to tile the mosques. Much of the finest art of true Persian style is attributed to his reign. Don Juan wrote that ten thousand shops flourished in the city, which boasted the first striking clock in Persia.

In those days the Vizier was called the Great Porter of the Empire, because he carried upon his shoulders the entire weight of responsibility. He was the most important man in the kingdom, second only to the Shah, yet he acknowledged himself the most abject of the royal slaves. Next came the General Commanding the Kurdish troops, who were selected from Tartars and armed with bows and arrows. Third ranked the Commandant of the Georgians and other white slaves; then the General of Musqueteers, who were strong men both mounted and on foot; then the Great Master of the Household, followed by the Master of the Horse.

The Chehel Situn, the Hall of the Forty Pillars, was the first place to which Rumi took us.

"Forty is well favoured in our history," he began.

"We have the Chehel Cheshmeh, the Forty Springs, whence rises the Living Stream, a day's trek by mule from the Karun River. Shah Tahmasp, and later Shah Abbas, sought to unite the two by cleaving the mountain, to bring more water to Isfahan. His successors thought well of the idea, but, anxious for full credit, began again in a different place. Neither was ever finished. Forty Thieves, Forty Daughters, the Place of Forty Bodies, the Forty Pillars."

"But there are only twenty," we ventured. "Why Forty Pillars?"

Rumi pointed to the pool.

"There are the other twenty," he said.

Sure enough, the pool reflected the pillars standing before us, conjuring the forty of repute. Inimitably Persian. Each tangible pillar, encased in red-painted panelling, rose from a base of four lions, two bodies to one head, and two spare heads, all equipped with splendid manes, but with the indignant expression of a small boy who has been told he may not have another square of chocolate. The veranda was paved with hexagonal flagstones. The roof was of blotched mirror mosaic, crudely lit by electricity, wire untidily festooned everywhere.

Breast high ran a shabby floral frieze. A pictured recess showed a richly dressed woman seated in a gilt chair, a serving wench offering her a golden jug and saucer encrusted with jewels, such as we saw at the Palace of the Sultans at Istanbul. Another painting, badly mildewed, showed a horseman, heavily moustached, returning victorious from slaying a lion (or was it a tiger?), attendants carrying long-barrelled rifles. Another picture portrayed a bewhiskered and bearded gentleman astride a dapple-grey stallion, in the act of spearing an astonished-looking lion, tail tucked well between its legs.

Giving off from the main veranda were small rooms used as offices. Back and sides of the building had high

loggias, decorated with faded pictures. A man dressed as a cavalier, in red, with foppish white collar and cuffs and brown curls, sat at a table with a lady wearing the sapphire blue velvet equestrian costume of the same period, with low, square-cut corsage and full skirt embroidered in red and blue; upon her curls a black and white hat with a spreading ostrich feather. Potentates clad in flowing robes, with scimitars and turbans, adorned one wall. A cavalier, wearing gold brocade knickerbockers with long knee frills, a blue velvet coat, and a black and blue hat set jauntily upon chestnut curls, gazed at a woman with a precariously perched golden crown upon her long dark tresses and leading a child by the hand. These portraits, perhaps of the brothers Shirley, bore out the supposition that the work was by an Italian artist.

The fifty-foot columns supporting these painted verandas were badly dilapidated, especially the decorated capitals and roof edges which were given over to the pigeons. The Hall of Forty Pillars, like so many eastern buildings, carried its glory in front. The rear made no claim to splendour, washed in green, and decorated with eastern scenes. Happily the wine-red, honeycombed ceilings were being restored to some measure of their former glory. Palace and gardens were built by Shah Abbas about three hundred years ago, and were partly destroyed by fire a century later.

From a decayed rafter, a bedraggled grey and black crow flapped down and perched upon one of the corner statues of the pool, each of which showed four bobbed-haired girls, attired only in kilts from waist to thigh, a string of beads around the neck, and a bangle of large jewels encircled with smaller ones. At the far end of the water rose a delicate blue loggia, shaped like a single lotus petal.

Within the hall the crafts of Isfahan were displayed, from melons to opium, carpets to clothes. The ceiling

had three circular domes: two of blue and gold mosaic, the third of an exotic mixture of black and gold. Between them, fresco panels stood against a pink ground. Great wall paintings portrayed incidents in the reign of Abbas. One showed him receiving the state visit of a Turkish potentate, dancing girls in the foreground wearing rich striped brocades; high bodices, frills around the waists, and long tight sleeves. Contrary to what we had always supposed, women waited upon the guests at the banquet, one in the foreground wearing a curious peaked hat, possibly a tricorne with the third point hidden, and carrying a long narrow-necked bulbous bottle. Another picture showed Abbas receiving an Indian rajah. The fine proportions of the room were hidden by screens hung with bazaar-stamped cotton cloths offered for sale. One could buy specimens of all the arts for which Isfahan was famous; moreover—enormous advantage in the East—at fixed prices. There were cigarette boxes, bracelets, pendants, necklaces, and book-marks painted with exquisite miniatures. There, too, was pottery, fashioned, baked, and glazed not half a mile from the scene; and woollen check rugs, cotton materials, glassware, wine, and beer. We spent far too long debating the respective merits of this tempting display, and had to hurry back.

After luncheon we again sallied forth, refreshed by some of the tenderest lamb we had ever come across, good home-grown vegetables, and Persian bread like a flabby rye biscuit. English loaves were unobtainable, as was anything but the worst butter.

We walked through narrow streets, walls towering above us, a running stream each side, into the main thoroughfare and to the Maidan-i-Shah, the King's Square. A formal garden occupied half the space where grey gravel paths bordered a central pool. The Maidan was a third of a mile long, and claimed to be the home of polo, although early record of the game was shrouded in the mist of ages.

THE HALF THE WORLD

Evidence showed that polo was in existence prior to the first Olympic Games held seven hundred and seventy-six years before Christ was born. Over four centuries later Darius was supposed to have sent a ball and a stick to Alexander, then but a boy, to intimate that he should confine his energies to sport, lest he meddle in more dangerous pursuits.

"The ball is the earth," was Alexander's reply. "I am the stick."

He had already made up his mind what he was going to do.

Another tale came from the third Christian century, of a youth who claimed to be the son of Ardeshir, then ruling over Persia.

"We shall soon see," said the king. "If he be a son of mine he will have a natural gift for polo."

The boy, commanded to play in the royal presence, drove the ball in a fine run up the field. It was enough. Accepted as Ardeshir's heir, he grew to be the valiant Shapur.

A century or so later three professors taught the hunter king, Bahram Gur, reading, archery and polo.

Fifteen hundred years ago women played polo at the Byzantine court. It was the sport of the Sassanian monarchs and their ladies about the seventh century; witness the poet Nizami, who took as inspiration Khosroe and his lovely Shirin, a Christian princess famed for beauty and for her prowess on horseback.

"When he (Khosroe) reached the polo ground,
The fairy-faced ones curvetted on their steeds with joy.
They started play, when every Moon
Appeared a Sun, and every partridge a hawk. . . .
At times the Sun bore off the ball, at times the Moon.
Now Shirin won and now the Shah."

Amir Muizzi, the poet-laureate of Sanjar, also wrote an ode to Shirin's skill at the game:

“For her rounded chin and her curved tress, alack! Her
 lovers all
 Lend bended backs for her polo sticks and a heart for the
 polo ball!”

She had two great lovers, the lowly Ferhad, a sculptor, and Khosroe, the greatest monarch of his dynasty, who made her his queen. Nizami's romantic verse told of the king's discovery that Ferhad was consumed with an overwhelming passion for Shirin. Therefore the king decided to put the inspired sculptor to work at Taq-i-Bustan with promise of special privileges. Under urge of milady's beauty, Ferhad gave of his best. His reward was to be Shirin. Khosroe, anxious to evade his promise, and not a little jealous of her charms, took counsel with a witch, who told Ferhad, when he had completed his labours, that Shirin had died. Straightway he cast himself from the mountain where he stood, that he might join her in Paradise. Two pregnant lines epitomize the sad tale:

“Ah, hapless youth! Ah, toil repaid with woe!
 A king thy rival, and the world thy foe.”

Shirin did not take his death lastingly to heart. Perhaps she never really loved him, for when Khosroe died, she asked for one look at her lord's body before taking her own life with a golden dagger.

The Caliph Haroun-ar-Rashid, hero of the “Tales of the Thousand Nights and one Night,” played polo in the eighth century, although he was so short he could scarcely reach the ball. Four or five centuries later, in the days of William the Conqueror, a book of rules existed. Omar Khayyam, Sadi, and Hafiz all mention the game. Omar moralized:

“The ball no Question makes of Ayes and Noes,
 But Right or Left as Strikes the player goes;
 And he that toss'd Thee down into the Field
 He knows about it all—He knows, HE knows!”

Otogai, son of Genghis Khan, selected his attendants according to their prowess at polo. Timurlane played in Damascus, the Mother of Cities, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, using a human head for ball. The sticks were like small elongated lacrosse bats, and were used as scoops.

The best Iranian miniature artist of to-day, Musaffar, painted for Queen Mary a village scene, and for Lady Louis Mountbatten a fine picture of polo during the seventeenth century, when the popularity of the game was at its height. From the pavilion of the Ali Qapu the court would watch scores of horsemen gallop up and down, playing what they called *gu-u-chogan*, a name possibly derived from the hard root of which the balls were made. Anyone could join in, on either side, and for as long as they pleased. In this miniature the Ali Qapu was on the right, veranda thronged with spectators, the Masjid-i-Shah behind. Although but half the ground was shown, over a hundred horsemen were drawn up in lines, or galloped after one or other of several large balls. Beneath a ceremonial umbrella, and surrounded by a bevy of attendants, rode the Shah, resplendent in gorgeous robes.

About that time the game began to capture European fancy. The Shah entertained some English guests after a banquet, by demonstrating a game with six-a-side. One guest described the players, " . . . having in their hands long rods of wood, about the bigness of a man's finger, and at one end of the rods a piece of wood nailed on like unto a hammer. After they were divided and turned face to face, there came one into the middle and threw a wooden ball between both the companies, and having goals made at either end of the plains, they began their sport, striking the ball with their rods from one to the other, in the fashion of our football play here in England; and ever when the king has gotten the ball before him, the drums and trumpets

would play one alarum." Polo traces direct descent from this game.

Two years after the Sepoy Mutiny the first polo club was inaugurated in Calcutta. A decade later it reached England as "hockey on horseback." The first important match was played at Aldershot in 1871, between teams of the 10th Royal Hussars and the 9th Lancers.

We saw the two goal posts still standing at either end of the square at Isfahan. Built of a hard grey stone, tapering to a formal sculptured top, they were set firmly in the ground, about seven feet high, and some eight yards apart. So massive was each post that two arms would not meet round it. How different from and, incidentally, how much more dangerous than, the modern basket-work, bunting-covered posts.

We could discern the site of the old stables, although the crumbling domes had lately been removed in favour of a police training-ground. A modern writer stated that he saw the stone mangers being demolished, but residents discredited his assertion.

Isfahan claimed to regard the game as fashioned in her likeness, and the Royal Square as the mother of all polo grounds, from Hurlingham to Cairo, Baghdad to Delhi, Khartoum to Meadowbrook, wherever man sat astride a horse. The contention that the name was derived from the traveller Marco Polo should be discounted.

At one time a horse fair was held twice a week upon the square, where merchants erected stalls. An arcade bounded the area, lit on fête days by crude lamps. A stream, clear and fresh, nourished fine trees and bubbled through the streets and courtyards. Although other means of watering were tried, none was so successful as this ancient way, said to have been designed by the mother of Shah Abbas. Of her it is told that she was prone to unlawful intrigue. She was eventually discovered by a court official who promptly stabbed her through the purdah

curtain. Meanwhile the Shah grimly prepared a cauldron of boiling oil, and addressed the offending lover:

"Come forth. I want your poison."

"I will administer it to myself," replied the culprit, as he jumped into the oil.

During the seventeenth century, in the centre of the square stood a mast, a hundred and twenty feet high. The young men would shoot with bow and arrow at a cup set thereon. When the king took part, a golden goblet was placed on the top, at which he shot an arrow as he rode at full speed, turning round to aim after he had passed.

From the Ali Qapu, Shah Abbas used to watch lions, bears, and cocks fight each other in the arena. He owned fighting rams and frequented gymnasia. Another sport was for young bloods to divide into two groups, each member armed with a dart three cubits long. Two players galloped off, pursued by the rest who aimed spears at them. The forward party would either catch the spears, or dodge them by slipping under the horse's belly; all at full gallop. They hunted the wild ass, still to be found a hundred miles north of Isfahan; also panthers and "ounces," a kind of small leopard. On horseback they chased and shot ibex and mouflon.

"Hawking was a favourite sport," volunteered Rumi. "A falcon was trained to pounce upon a hare, one of the falcon's legs dragging along the ground until the claws caught on to a firm tuft of grass. Leather breeches prevented the bird from being torn in two. Another version of the chase was for the hunter to slip the dogs, which singled a buck from its fellows. The hawks, trained with great patience to work with man and dog, then darted at the eyes of the quarry, impeding its progress until the dogs caught up and killed it, unless the buck was anointed with the oil of resuscitation and rose as a bird from the snare of the fowler."

He went on to tell us that *cherkh* hawk was used to

hunt the black and white *houbara* bustard, which had a slate-coloured breast, greenish-brown wings, and a dark grey bill.

Entrance to the gardens was in the Maidan-i-Shah, by way of the Ali Qapu, or Supreme Gate, crowned with a balcony, and built for royal receptions of great splendour. The arches, one above the other, formed the veranda supports, spoiled by a dirty stove-pipe thrusting between colourful tiles. Thirty or forty cannon, captured at Hormuz, used to stand on each side. Those entering were forbidden to place foot upon the threshold, but had to step over it, like the Devil Worshippers at their shrine of Sheikh Adi in Northern 'Iraq. From the massive doorway we climbed mean spiral stairs meandering this way and that up the back of the building. We crossed several rooms, tiles broken and stolen by those seeking fine fire-places and floors for their jerry-built houses. The walls were stuccoed and washed pink and white to hide wondrous paintings.

A great loggia stretched wide and open, like the massive porch of the Hall of Forty Pillars, the panelled ceiling supported by six wooden pillars carved at the capitals. In the centre a sunken fountain, forlorn and empty, of yore brimmed over with water distilled from the sweet-smelling Persian rose. Above this lofty veranda were small rooms and recesses, every inch painted with a picture or a raised motif. Some, in out-of-the-way corners, shone clear and true, scarcely changed from their first pristine freshness.

The Ali Qapu fell into the hands of Sultan Jelch, in the middle of the nineteenth century. When he saw the paintings lavished upon the walls, he grew fearful that his treasure would be wrested from him, so he covered everything with whitewash. This wore thin, showing glimpses of figures, in varying stages of nudity, reclining at their ease.

Built like the Sath Khana of the Kings of Oudh, seven

stories high, the Ali Qapu boasted a gold-leaf ceiling. Seventy years ago the rooms were richly carpeted with rugs woven hundreds of years before, the colours as fresh as when they were first fashioned. Upon the topmost floor we saw several mysterious chambers, the purpose of which none could fathom with certainty. The walls from about seven feet up were honeycombed to the ceiling with recesses four or five inches deep, which looked as though they had been carved by fretwork. Each was in the shape of a musical instrument, a vase, or a drinking vessel, a flask, or a jar; and painted a faded red, which conjured to our mind a Victorian wallpaper. The connecting links between the recesses were painted in sombre colours. It struck us that it all looked like a cardboard box fitted to take a child's tea-set. The plaster over the lower half of the walls was too light to obscure the thinly-veiled forms playing curious instruments. The centre room, connected to the others by arches, had a small dome the colour of lapis lazuli. What was the purpose of the fantasia? Perhaps music gave forth a specially pleasing echo.

"Cool in summer," said Rumi, "thanks to the breezes, the Ali Qapu has resounded to many a scene of feasting and pleasure. We believe that when music is played herein, if the key of time be turned in the lock of isolation, after three days the melody will still ring clear, the sound losing little intensity as it is tossed from one recess to the other.

"If your legs will carry you farther," he continued, "climb the rest of the hundred and seventeen steps to the topmost roof, whence a splendid panorama will stretch before your enlightened eyes."

We raced up the stairs quickly, not to be outdone by the greybeard who showed us over, and arrived at the summit quite giddy, good for nothing but to stagger to the side and lean against the low ornamental brick parapet. We had forgotten, in our eagerness, that Isfahan was over

five thousand feet above sea-level. We wiped the sweat from our eyes and awoke to the view.

"If the world had no Isfahan, the World Creator would have no world," murmured Rumi. "But although the city is the Paradise of Luxury, there ought to be no Isfahanis in it."

We made a slow tour around the flat roof, noting the original wooden scaffolding, protruding as it did in most old Iranian buildings; with the slight difference that the roof was tiled with square bricks. We noticed many roofs with a top dressing of mud, whereon grass sprang in profusion, causing a whole village to look from above like a garden. Rumi told us of a traveller who, riding his horse down a steep hill, did not remark the difference and rode straight through the roof, falling upon a family celebrating the marriage of their eldest son.

Directly opposite the Ali Qapu, across the Royal Square, was the Mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah, in splints when we saw it.

"Sheikh Lutfullah," volunteered Rumi, "was like one of your bishops. He was a learned Mullah at the time of Shah Abbas, when his mosque was private for the ladies and families of the Shah."

Covered bazaars extended to right and left of the main entrance, in front of which stood, of course, a pool. Immediately within the doorway, an iron grille in the floor afforded light to the crypt below. Fine tiles adorned the walls.

Spiral tiling framed mosaic panels in the central hall, offering a problem as to how they were baked in one piece. No join could be discovered. Some of the tiles were less than two hundred years old, because of the introduction of a pink motif; for the art of pink colouring was not discovered until the eighteenth century. The roof was being repaired. In the central chamber lay the paraphernalia. Upon the floor stood a wooden structure shaped like an

inverted section of the dome. On this the tiles, covered with paper that they might not be scratched, were batched face down in the position they would assume upon the roof outside. As the workmen required them, the tiles were carried up in carefully arranged sections and laid in place.

Descending by a shallow winding staircase, we entered an underground hall, used for worship during the winter months. A horn lantern shed a dim and fitful light. Half the space was curtained off for the use of the women. Everywhere plaited rushes strewed the floor, affording protection against the cold stone. In the dim light an old Mullah intoned verses from the Quran, in an atmosphere not unlike that of the Christmas midnight mass at Bethlehem. Only his white turban, set far back upon his venerable head, caught the light. Around the walls ran foot-high verses of the Quran, in white characters upon the usual blue ground. Through one or two grilles in the ceiling we glimpsed the entrance, lit by the sun.

But we have wandered far from the roof of the Ali Qapu.

Behind, to the left of the Mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah, and above the distant hum of the bazaars, rose an austere twelfth-century minaret, of a sober brown and of an unusual height.

Behind and to the right of the Mosque stood a mud fort, strengthened with buttresses, turrets, and loopholes. Isfahanis liked to think that the fort was built by Shah Sultan Husein, who sought only after learning. Isfahan to him typified wisdom, so he spent his days there, arguing and debating with the Mullahs upon points of academic interest. Not until the Afghans knocked at his door did he awake to the imminent danger of invasion. He hurriedly built this fort, but to no avail. Afghans overran all Isfahan. His successor, Nadir Shah, drove them back so effectively that he captured their country, and subdued a goodly slice of India as well. The fort was a going concern in Chardin's time, who reported that it contained many of

the court jewels, powder magazines, and other commodities. We wondered idly what the Persians of that day thought of India. Their ancestors had swept across the land centuries before, influencing art and the mode of living.

Wherever we looked we saw mountains. Here and there minarets presided over commerce and home, above even the coloured domes of the mosques. A few cedar trees set off pale green crops and simple buildings. A square house, appearance belying its alluring title of the Eight Gates of Paradise, was built in the time of Shah Abbas, its blue tiles silhouetted against the rich green of cypress trees.

At the south of the square stood the Masjid-i-Shah, the Royal Mosque, skilfully offset from the main entrance. From the roof of the Ali Qapu we saw it as a high dome with four minarets, in blue and green spaced with yellow.

We took a last view of the panorama before descending, and remembered to step over the polished alabaster door-sill.

CHAPTER VI

CARAVANSERAI

WE strolled self-consciously by the policeman on duty outside his headquarters. Somehow the Iranian police made us guiltily aware of such harmless trifles as camera, notebook, and pencil. Safely past official scrutiny, we wandered along a line of itinerant photographers ready and anxious to take our picture. There were some ten or a dozen of these men, mostly destitute Russians, Rumi told us, many of whom had made their cameras themselves from bits and pieces. Some wore black top-boots and short fur-lined leather coats. Others were wrapped in rags, the cheapest things they could pick up after their perilous flight from their own country. We refused all overtures politely but firmly, and sauntered across the square. Why did street photographers always contrive to make us look like a half-caste negro contemplating murder, when our ancestors were strictly Nordic?

Apart from repairs ordered by the Shah, new shops built to his design surrounded the square, forming part of the cloistered bazaars, vaulted after the fashion of the days of Shah Abbas. Above, white clouds stood out against the sky, bluer and finer than any man-made tiles. At the north end, the coloured entrance included part of the Makarah Khana, or band towers, where music used daily to announce sunrise and sunset. From there, incidentally, Hajji Baba set forth upon his travels. The bazaars stretched for many miles, twisting and winding about the heart of the city, selling and fashioning all manner of wares.

Upon cloth woven in Russia or locally, craftsmen with unfaltering speed drew freehand designs in indelible ink. Small boys elaborated these patterns, casually slopping a bedraggled brush into a saucer of colour, and working rapidly with a curious rhythmical jerk of the body. Tablecloths and bedspreads were being hand stamped.

The covered streets, lined with narrow shops, criss-crossed here and there at vaulted domes from which veiled beauties peered through pear-wood grilles. Only the name recalled where Shah Abbas minted his coins, hard by what were once the premises of the Honourable East India Company.

A furnace blared red-gold through the oval mouth of an oven. Bakers, their bodies glistening and bare save for loin cloths, kneaded bread, sprinkled it with caraway seeds, and rolled it with swift surety into thin discs. Tossing them from one to the other and finally on to a convex plate, apprentices plunged their hands into the heat, and clapped the discs to the sides of the glowing oven. After a few minutes they peeled them off again, browned to a turn. Rubbing shoulders with the bustling passers-by, stood a patient donkey, who not only transported his master's wares, but obligingly lent his back as a fruit stall, equipped with scales and till; apples, oranges, and pomegranates arranged to attract the most fastidious customer.

A few yards farther along the candlestick-maker, that legendary figure familiar since babyhood, plied his trade. In an inner chamber, dusty, dim, and smoky, a wooden hoop hung horizontally from the ceiling. We remembered watching a woman knitting a circular scarf upon a round wooden frame, hitching the stitches over one another with a pin. The candlemaker's contraption was like one of those, hung upside down. Slowly, round and round it spun, each peg fitted with a crude wick. He was an old, old man, our candlemaker, who filled the bill of a fairy-tale magician.

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Dressed in ample mysterious robes and a felt skull-cap, his gnarled face shone in the glow of a furnace which gilded his silvery beard. Bending to an earthenware bowl, he ladled his goat-fat over the pendant pegs, sixty or eighty of them. The surplus liquid dripped back into the pan, to be reheated when it showed signs of congealing; at each application a little more adhering to the embryo candle, like a stalactite obsessed with American hustle.

Next door lived a high-class fruit merchant; apples, melons, oranges, limes, pomegranates, and small objects like shrivelled cherries were arranged in precise order, polished by hand and spittle.

A large open doorway, tiled in yellow and blue, gave on to a Mullah's school of long standing. Class-rooms opened off a courtyard, and alternated with wooden lattices, in a quiet dignity accentuated by the noisy bustle outside. The silence was broken only by the ripple of a stream bubbling from beneath our feet, and running fussily between the grey flagstones, to disappear under the farther wall. Almost opposite the school, uneven shallow steps led down to the vaulted entrance of a *hammam*, the public bath-house, roof and sides adorned with vigorous paintings of warriors, wearing long moustaches, who were encased in chain mail, and struck stiff, warlike attitudes.

We could go on for hours recounting the sights and sounds of the bazaar; of the potter, with his oven sealed every week to bake tiles and pots and plates in a heat maintained at a precise temperature; of the miniature painter, apprentices bent over the work of the master; of the moneychanger pouring clinking coins between grasping fingers; and of a hundred others.

We emerged at the far end of the bazaars, near a tall Seljuk minaret. In a donkey serai the hard-worked little beasts enjoyed a brief and well-earned rest, bells about their necks tinkling as they bent their heads.

We stepped into the unpretentious porch of the

Masjid-i-Jumma, the Mosque of the Congregation, which fulfilled the function of an English cathedral. Even at the largest festivals there was always room therein for those who came to pray. Probably built at the end of the seventh century, soon after the rise of Islam, this mosque, unlike others, had scarcely any colouring. There was no need. The bricks spoke for themselves. Sir Edwin Lutyens could not have hit upon a more apt appellation than when he dubbed them brick magic. Their ultimate form represented true Persian art, tuned to a nicety; delicately subtle, with a rhythmic flow.

Persian decorators always took care not to detract from the beauty of simple line. The Achæmenids adorned their walls with enamel, bas-reliefs, and metals. The Sassanians preferred stucco and mural paintings. Islam grew rich, spectacular, more abundant. But through all her vicissitudes Persia ever retained a sense of form. Unadorned brickwork, in her hands, came nigh unto perfection. In the eleventh century, the Seljuk kings built vaulted roofs and domes. The fourteenth century specialized in the decorative value of shadows, light and shade forming letters and verses from the Quran. The Persians developed to a fine art the mode of placing a round roof upon a four-square building, as did the Moors. Honey-combed bricks formed a decoration in themselves. Sir Edwin Lutyens compared the ill-equipped, non-technical armies of the mediæval Persians to their buildings, which achieved strength and greatness although not conforming to recognized pattern.

Attempts to repair the crumbling masonry of the Mosque of the Congregation were not as successful as they might have been. Although technically correct, modern tiles neither in pattern nor in colour caught the rhythm of the ancient ones. In days gone by, even hidden corners were well finished, instead of being patched with odd pieces. Upon our first visit we wandered awe-struck

about the courtyard at noon, watching fish, golden, silver, and brown, swimming about a roofed pool. The Mullah, clad in black robes, ascended a squat tower above one of the four domes, and exhorted the Faithful:

“Come to Prayer. Come to Salvation.
God is Good. Come to Prayer.”

His voice, more melodious, more tuneful than any we had heard in our peregrinations about the Moslem world, rose and fell in cadences conceived over a thousand years ago. So like Gregorian chants were they that we had quite a shock. Thus Eastern music approached and melted into that of the West.

Carved alabaster plaques adorned the lower walls, supporting fine brickwork, of which the measurements were recently taken, that the majesty be not lost to posterity, should the weight of years finally prove too heavy. Experts averred that never again would workmen accomplish anything so worth while. A curved surface arose from cunningly placed flat bricks. The decoration of each domed ceiling, of which we saw more than twenty of varying sizes, was different from its fellows. Thick pillars supported the side halls, merging like feathery palm trees into domed roofs. The floor was of alabaster. Never before had we seen such effects from plain bricks; juggled bricks. Yet the whole was as calm and dignified as a cathedral crypt.

The Mullah's carved pulpit faced an archway forty or fifty feet high. A delicate tracery of iron lattice-work kept us at our distance. Above, in the curve of the arch, fluttered pigeons, mauve and grey and rose-pink, everywhere leaving their mark.

Behind a door, carefully locked to protect the treasure within, stood a mullah's niche of stucco, designed like a gigantic cobra's head, hood raised; verging on the Indian style in ornamentation. Persian decoration subtly

influenced that of India. Both styles affected pointed arches, because they were not built with a keystone. An amateur should not presume to draw conclusions, save perhaps to observe that the Persians seemed instinctively to know when to stop.

We descended into a vast underground chamber, dim and silent. The light of the sun, filtering through slabs of alabaster set in the ceiling, shone in golden radiance.

We reclinbed the steps, awed at the thought that early Islam achieved worldly as well as spiritual glory. We strolled towards the entrance, beset by small boys in grey school uniforms and peaked caps, who bumped leather satchels over the flagged courtyard. They had said their midday prayers. God would be bountiful to them. When did we last pray?

Reluctantly retracing our steps, we plunged into the humming bazaars, and found ourselves once again in the Royal Square, blinking in the sunlight with the same sense of unreality that we felt upon emerging from a theatre matinée. Which was the less real? The scene upon which the curtain had just dropped, or the hollow-sounding come and go of the streets? We hailed a droszky, a vehicle like a starved Victoria, and drove home to tea. As we made our way through the busy streets, a whole family upon one horse caught our eye. Father was sternly seated amidships, mother in front, a small boy before her, and two other children hanging on behind as best they could.

In contrast to the holy places of India and 'Iraq, no difficulties came our way when we wished to visit the Masjid-i-Shah, the King's Mosque, for we were accompanied by the Governor's A.D.C. and a police constable. Indeed, the porter welcomed our advent, sensing a substantial tip. Tiled walls inside and out were being restored at the Shah's command, and, moreover, they were being restored well.

The entrance faced north, looking across the square to the bazaars. Inside, the building was offset, that the Mullah's niche might point to Mecca. So cleverly was this achieved that we did not realize, until we had walked all round and again emerged, that we were facing in a different direction.

The great doorway, tiled in turquoise, lapis lazuli, green, and yellow, rose from squat inset pillars of carved Yezd alabaster, highly polished by years of loving attention from straying hands and bodies. The big doors, panelled in beaten brass, stood open. Within, the central theme was an immense flagged courtyard, wherein two shallow pools, surface like black glass, reflected the domes above. Words failed us when we tried to appreciate the beauty. Each court, connected by cloisters, seemed too good to be true. Certainly no other could surpass it in beauty. Courts gave off in unexpected places, some open to the heavens and to the inevitable pigeons; some with ceilings tiled in fantastic and telling patterns. Dignified bowls in stone or alabaster provided water wherein worshippers might perform ablutions, especially upon eyes, nose, and mouth. One or two of these bowls were empty and gave forth a clear ring when we tapped them.

Our guide led us step by step to the largest hall, niche centring one side, the others supported by pillars, and giving on to yet more courts. So high that it made us dizzy to contemplate, the dome rose blue, yellow, and green; floral patterns alternating in vast conception. One huge block of alabaster formed the Mullah's pulpit and steps. Curious children clustered open-mouthed around us, until a venerable old man laid about him with a hazel switch, causing delighted shrieks to echo in the vastness around. The mosque, famed for perfect resonance, was ideally designed for the exhortations of the priests. Rumi proudly extolled its virtues.

"This mosque," he said, "has a secret, which I will tell

to you, all save the way in which the effect is achieved, for that nobody knows. Tap beneath the centre of the dome. You will hear seven echoes."

He led us forward a few paces and stamped his foot. Clarion clear came the answer: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, and perhaps more.

"What of the other echoes?" we asked.

A wise look crept over Rumi's face.

"They are not for our ears," he replied. "They belong to Allah, and are beyond. He allows us to hear but seven. If our ears stretch for the eighth, something will happen to frustrate our wish. It is not for us to ask."

Fascinated, like children with a noisy toy, we stamped gently beneath the turquoise roof. Each time, as if to set vagrant doubt at rest, the echoes rang clear and true upon ears delighted by the answering tone.

"When you climb one of the four minarets," remarked Rumi, "you will make it vibrate, which movement will be communicated to the other minarets. They will shake in rhythm."

We took his word for it.

Above a side dome of the Royal Mosque rose a small square pavilion, whence the muezzin was wont to call the Shah to prayer, his voice carrying over the trees and lawns and floating across the ornamental waters.

"I will now show you the Chahar Bagh, the Avenue of the Four Gardens, which has no equal in the world," said our friend. "You will be delightful."

He meant delighted, we supposed. Anyhow, we were full of praise at that same vista where Tavernier "saluted the City; into which we entered by Two fair Rows of Elms, on each hand one, planted by the fides of Chryftal streams, reaching a long way through a broad street. . . ."

The Avenue of the Four Gardens, broad with the beauty of silver poplars and chenar trees nurtured by running streams, bordered the Madrassah, or Mullah's

College, which once had four hundred and forty-four doors. A few years ago there were ten thousand Mullahs and students. At the time of our visit there were not one hundred. A large bowl in the courtyard symbolized the water which Hazrat Abbas took to Kerbala at the cost of his life.

"Rich families," said Rumi, "have 'supports' here; mausoleums or chapels, where relatives were wont to come to drink tea and to read the Quran."

Plaques of embossed silver embellished the gates, some washed with gilt, and all of a floral pattern, sole visible remnant of the grandeur plundered by the Afghans a few years after the college was built. Shortly before the Great War the Russians erected scaffolding which was not removed until twenty years later. The college was built upon the old caravanserai pattern, a stream running through the centre, and a round tower at each corner. We were allowed, for the first time in our life, to climb a minaret. A show of reluctance met the request, but when we affirmed that we would not take our camera with us, the mists cleared, and we entered a doorway so low that we were forced to bend double, almost crawling upon hands and knees. Once inside we straightened ourself and climbed the steep spiral stairs. At the top, another low door led to the circular platform from which the Mullah called his flock. Attention thus arrested, we noticed other minarets with low square doorways. Why, we wondered, were they thus fashioned?

"Who knows?" said Rumi, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Perhaps the door at the top is small because, if they had a big one, the minaret might overbalance, so thin and tall is it!"

From the summit we looked upon the college and over the trees. In olden days the central avenues were reserved for horse traffic and the other two for promenades; one for men and the one for their wives and sisters. No man

might walk abroad even with his own wife. What changes we saw. Limousines glided by, filled with unveiled Iranian beauties. Men and women jostled one another. Barriers were down for good, welcomed by the good-looking girls, upon whose bright-lit faces few men had gazed before.

The authorities recently extended the avenue through the town, across the main street, destroying houses without ruth where they impeded the path of progress. At first the hapless owners received no compensation. Later they did, if the whole property was swept away. Should only a part be demolished, the Pahlevi ruled that the value of the section remaining had become enhanced by proximity to the new thoroughfare. No compensation was therefore necessary. During demolition, ancient interiors were exposed; mysterious lattice windows, dark with much woodwork and little glass; and tiled and vaulted roofs.

Near one of Riza's new factories we passed an old hollow chinar tree, said to have been planted by Abbas himself. As we drove to the Zenduh Rud, the Living River, we saw the ruins of two old palaces. In one had lived a Shah, and in the other his seraglio. Uniting the two, a bridge, along which he used to pass on pleasure bent, seemed haunted by the shade of his solitary figure pacing between the crumbling ruins in search of former glories. We visited the remaining bridges. The massive arches of the Ali Verdi Khan Bridge, high and enclosed, and built for Abbas by his general, Ali Verdi Khan, housed kiosks reminiscent of old London Bridge. Giant buttresses, streamlined (yes, even in those days), broke the force of the water, as they did in the three-thousand-year-old aqueduct of Sennacherib at Jerwan. A spiral way led to the lower level which looked like huge stepping-stones with roofs over them. Sluggish in summer, a roaring torrent in spring and autumn, the stream has been known to be frozen over in winter. At the base of the steps, as though guarding the flow of the water, lions stood sentinel, brought from their original

task of guarding the grave of a Bakhtiari warrior. Cut in stone, each held within its jaws a human head. Around the neck was carved the sword of the deceased warrior, scabbard traced from shoulder to quarter, whip upon the opposite flank. At the sides hung shovel stirrups. The graves of Bakhtiari warriors were always guarded thus, by emblems of strength and war, even in death.

Nearby were the Pul-i-Khaju and the Pul-i-Shehaistan, built with one eye on defence.

Rumi took us to a romantic lane, an avenue of shaded trees, remote from the bustle of the town, yet near enough to hear the Living River rippling over the rounded stones. The lane strayed from what we thought might be called the Bridge of Sighs to the Bridge of Content. In the daytime the needs of few compelled them along this way, filled at night by untrammelled thought. Line upon line of thin saplings stretched heavenwards, feet kissed by running water.

"Here the ground resembles velvet, and the air breathes perfume," said Rumi. "Here cypress trees rise black as night in the moonlight. Here the nightingale flutters about the full-blown rose of expectation, intoxicated by the blooms in the Garden of Destiny."

Backs still turned upon Isfahan, we drove a couple of miles to Julfa. Shah Abbas imported twelve thousand Armenians so that his people might learn from their industry, for they excelled in craftsmanship and in brewing wines and spirits. Their settlement they named Julfa, after the town in the Caucasus whence they came. They brought with them masonry, carpentry, tile-making, carpet-weaving, and the art of the goldsmith. At one time they numbered over thirty thousand, but after the death of Abbas they fell into disfavour, and were accused of aiding the Afghans. They were persecuted until they dwindled to three or four hundred. A few months ago they had increased again to about three thousand. Their old-fashioned dress,

picturesque and gaudy, was no longer to be seen, except on special occasions. Armenian craftsmen excelled in the fashioning of weapons of war, casting formidable cannon; for martial blood still coursed through their veins, despite persecution by Tartars, Saracens, Turks, and Persians. Zanzameh, the famous old gun in Lahore, with mention of which Kipling opened *Kim*, was cast by an Armenian, the eighteenth-century Krupp of India, who decorated the barrel with two long inscriptions in Persian, setting forth that his order had been to make a gun "terrible as a dragon and huge as a mountain."

We were warmly welcomed at the Armenian Cathedral, heavy with paintings and rich carpets. Built three hundred years ago, little had been altered. The style more or less followed that of the Russian Orthodox Church, square beneath a round dome. Rich rugs covered the floor. A travelling Florentine artist, who certainly gave his employers their money's worth, decorated every inch of wall and ceiling with striking scenes. One space was devoted to an awesome representation of Life and Death. Below was Hell, the occupants bare and glistening, sweating from tongues of flame.

"Uncommonly perspired," Rumi remarked.

A few feet higher up the wall, Hell gave place to earth, peopled mainly by partially clad priests, presumably on their way to the Heaven above, where the occupants were fully robed, and manifesting every sign of enjoying themselves.

Breast high, all round the walls, were vivid reminders of frightful horrors in store for the transgressor. Three gentlemen, surprisingly endowed with benign features, constituted themselves the torturers of an unfortunate girl. One was having a happy half-hour gouging out her eyes; another was busy disembowelling her; the third was pleasantly engaged in breaking her legs with ankle screws. The next panel showed a hog wearing a golden crown;

followed by the picture of a crown hovering between a tomb and a rapturous vision of Heaven. Then came a bishop blessing a man and a woman. Another series showed a saint undergoing trials: crucified; boiling oil poured over his head; bastinadoed; men inflating his body with air, legs weighted, head and neck imprisoned within a screw; boiling oil poured into his body between his legs as he hung upside down, his head enveloped in a bag; dragged by the hair over a sheet of iron studded with sharp nails; his breast gashed with sickles; flogged, tied by the wrists to a tree.

Breathing heavily, our eyes round with horror, we turned to a large fresco of the Tower of Babel. Other paintings showed incidents in the lives of saints and prophets, crudely executed but none the less telling for that. The high altar of beaten silver supported twelve massive candlesticks, tarnished and neglected. The air was heavy with incense.

Rumi told us of the Armenian belief that Noah's immediate descendants settled at Naradna, where his wife was buried. They lost sight of the exact place until the end of the eighteenth century, when the ground parted in an earthquake, exposing for an instant a stone tomb.

Until a few years ago the transplanted Armenians did not intermarry with Isfahanis. A few then dared to break the fetters of convention, but they were regarded with displeasure by the old brigade.

Retracing our steps, we returned to Isfahan, pausing for a moment to visit one of the famous pigeon towers at a corner of the old wall which once surrounded the city. Hard by an aggressive young hangar, made of corrugated iron, an aerodrome lay on the age-old site of the Thousand Valleys, where shahs were wont to shoot at the pigeons. Each of these honeycombed towers provided homes for about five thousand pigeons. The very shadows cast a pleasing design. We saw other towers in the fields, mute

relics of days of greatness, derelict, shorn of life, and of all else save an academic interest. At the height of Isfahan's fame her inhabitants kept about three million pigeons, disturbed once a year to collect the guano to manure the fields, as they had done since the dawn of time; witness the Second Book of Kings, "The fourth part of a cab of dove's dung was sold for five pieces of silver." In the early nineteenth century pigeon guano was regarded as a marketable commodity in England as well as in Persia, and sold at half a crown a bushel.

In the fertilized fields melons were cultivated, and were famous for centuries, some weighing as much as sixty pounds. Aesthetic Persians would employ a melon diviner, whose sole job was to tell his master the psychological moment when the fruit attained perfection.

History and craftsmanship reflected the culture of Isfahan more than that of most cities. Rumi showed us a desolate valley to the south, reputed scene of Rustam's battles with the Dragon, and laid waste by the beast's poisonous breath, linking the tale Rumi told us at Pahlevi about the prince Husein. There stood the Pillar of the Running Footman, from which every aspirant to service in the royal household had to carry twelve separate arrows to the city, between the rising and the setting of the sun. On this subject he enlightened us further.

"A Shah who had close upon twelve hundred family ties, and who, moreover, was a poet rich with the odour of reputation, promised his daughter, as brilliant as the sun and as placid as the moon, to anyone who could run before the royal horse from Shiraz to this, the Beloved City. A man of no consequence was upon the point of success. Misliking the idea of him as a son-in-law, the Mountain of Magnificence dropped his whip, which the runner somehow contrived to pick up in his stride. The Shah then dropped his ring. The man, forced by etiquette to stoop, was overrun and killed. He was buried where he fell.

Until his tomb crumbled into oblivion it was known as that of Shatir, the Royal Runner."

Apart from lineage and record, the city possessed riches in a wide economic life. We could scarcely imagine a place with so many interests, so much commerce, and so much adoring. Thus did she sustain her reputation of the Half the World. Her industries were famous for centuries. Silk worms were reared, and cloth was spun by Iranians born in the fields to work in the towns. We saw woollen carpets woven by small boys working for dear life; and women making fine silk rugs of elegant designs, in striking contrast to the rags they wore.

Agriculture spread around, securing the tenure of life for thousands, holding promise of food supplies under all conditions, through every vicissitude. Yet the produce sometimes rotted in the fields for want of those with the price of it; for want of a market, and of the means and money to reach it.

The gardens were good to look upon, gay with flowers and foliage, even the sleep-giving poppies of Virgil contributing their part.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIELD OF OIL

OUR motor-boat glided to one of Abadan's many jetties. We stepped ashore at noon. The fire siren gave the luncheon blast. Idly we wondered what would happen were there a fire at that very moment. Presumably everyone would go off as usual, unwittingly leaving the flames to burn.

The D.P. was ushered into the majesty of Number Three at the water's edge, while we found hardly less exalted comfort at Number Ten. That afternoon we were shown how the wheels went round. For mile upon mile machinery towered above us and sprang from beneath our feet, always being repaired, erected, or destroyed to make way for something new. Incidentally, B.P. stood for many things besides British Petrol, including *Benzine Persane* and *Barikallah Pahlevi*; which means Praise be to Allah for the Shah Pahlevi!

There were rows of houses, mostly bungalows, for the employees of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company; English, Iranian, and a dwindling company of Indians. The British community alone numbered over a thousand, their exile ameliorated by playing-fields and clubs, one housed in a flat-bottomed steamer moored in a wide channel.

We were invited to visit the oil-fields. In the old days, orders to go to "Fields" were greeted with a sigh. The Shatt-al-Arab flowed in a bulge between Abadan and Khorram-Shahr, called Mohammerah until the recent campaign for purging Iran of her foreign words. So by steamer the journey took us about an hour, although

overland the two were only six miles apart. Before the advent of the motor this was a wearisome journey by cart. At Khorram-Shahr travellers and luggage were transferred to a penny-steamer, still, believe it or not, chugging up and down the Karun river, twin paddles at the stern churning the water like what Rumi called the frilly "unders" of a can-can dancer. We would not have been surprised had the entire cast of the *Show Boat* stepped out of the cabins upon the upper deck. The *Blosse Lynch*, named after the captain of the *Tigris* which foundered in the River Euphrates, was the first steamer to ascend the Karun, about 1888. Almost the only navigable, yet probably the swiftest, river in Iran, the Karun flowed through the gorge of Akili, the White Castle. Some say that Rustam built a castle there when he was fighting a maiden queen who lived upon the opposite bank. Others say that one of her suitors would daily prove his love by swimming the foaming torrent to visit her. At one time it stood out for many months against authority. At last the owner came to the king, who was naturally incensed against him.

"Sire," said the nobleman, "I wished to prove to you what a strong fortress I could build. If your Majesty's soldiers, known to be the best in the world, cannot capture it, nobody else can. I give my castle to you, my Liege."

The king created him a general on the spot.

A sudden spate once came down the Karun, swept away fifty of the Shah's cavalry, and was so violent that it prevented the rest from crossing for two days. Many years ago the development of commerce was seriously arrested for lack of water transport, in the days when the Karun flowed direct into the Gulf; but the stream has been diverted into the Shatt-al-Arab. The original channel became known as the Bahmashir, a name possibly derived from the king Bahman Ardeshir.

Up this river then, the traveller, about eighty years

ago, for two nights and a day moved with forgotten dignity towards the rapids at Ahwaz, round which he had to walk, transhipping himself and his goods into another and smaller boat, travelling more than two hundred miles from start to finish. At that time it was no uncommon thing to see fresh lion pugs upon the river bank. Thence an American buck-board waggon, drawn by mules, swayed and bumped through the gorge of the Tembi river to Fields about thirty-five miles away, then known as Maidan-i-Naftun, the Field of Oil; to-day called Masjid-i-Suleiman, the Temple of Solomon. Originally this journey took five days. What a different proposition from forty minutes!

We drove to the aerodrome, half-way to Khorram-Shahr, where the larger of the two hangars proclaimed ABADAN from a shining roof. We scribbled a signature upon a printed statement that we concealed no cameras about our person, and took off from the permanent runway.

Beneath and behind lay six straight lines of two hundred silvery oil tanks and a labyrinth of machinery, fringed with date palms encircling the island of Abadan. Then came miles of desert, waterlogged from the recent rain, looking like mildewed blotting-paper. We followed the river. Four parallel pipes wandered through a pumping station on the left bank. Within a rectangular enclosure stood two big tanks, one black and one red with a white roof. Desultory outhouses flanked four tall chimneys at the corners of a central red-roofed building. The sun kissed a kidney-shaped blue lake, fed from a tortuous half-dry stream. Small mud villages bestrode the banks amid spasmodic attempts at cultivation. A railway line lay to the right. We flew over Ahwaz, then over Tembi, towards foot-hills and above a dust storm like a low swirling cloud.

Once, in 1917, an oil-pipe valve at Tembi burst under pressure, near the furnaces. The English superintendent rushed and turned off the fuel supply. He saved a

disaster, but alas he died from his burns. For this act of conspicuous bravery he was awarded the Royal Albert Medal in gold.

In half an hour we reached the mountains, leaving stagnant pools flanked by sandy ridges blown by the wind into troubled muddy lakes. The hills were humped and barren, thrusting starkly from the earth, looking like orphan children grown out of sleeves and trousers. Buttressed ribs of rock shored up a higher range thrown into relief by shadows, in sharp contrast to fertile valley and desolate hillside. Twisting yellow paths like dried fern fronds straddled the hills. A series of tablelands, each higher than the last, assumed a deeper red with every ascent, cut by a clear stream winding beneath high banks among the hills. One or two stunted trees clung precariously to crevices. We flew over springs of white oil, which, if put in the natural state into a lamp, would burn clearly. Suddenly we saw a silver tank set in the almond green of sparse spring grass. Then another, and another. Here and there the deep orange of a flame leapt high into the air. How right Pierre Loti was when he remarked, "*Il doit y avoir d'immenses richesses métallurgiques, encore inexploitées et inconnues dans ces montagnes.*"

Where could an aeroplane possibly land among those tumbled mountains and dales? Unexpectedly we came upon a grassy plain two thousand feet above sea-level, beneath the Hill of the Goats. Thence we drove sixteen miles to Masjid-i-Suleiman, a journey which took almost as long as the hundred and thirty odd we had flown. The road wound between green hillocks and brown mountains, and finally rounded a corner where we gazed over a wide valley. Following the contours, we descended, and drew up on the far side, to stretch cramped limbs before a comforting fire. When darkness fell, our host drove us to a hill crest. As far as we could see, flames leapt twenty or thirty feet into the air, the smoke above them lost in a night

so brightly lit that we could see to read. One might almost have fancied them as the setting for Dante's Inferno.

We expressed surprise that there were so few inhabitants, but Rumi assured us that they lived tucked away in small villages in the folds of the Bakhtiari mountains.

"They are primitive peoples," he said reflectively. "I can relate to you a story to prove this. A man and his wife living not fifty miles from here, although married for many faithful years, were childless. To her joy, the woman at last gave birth to a baby, a boy. When he was a year old his parents came to the conclusion that he must be possessed of a demon, of the kind which grips babies by the throat until they are unable to breathe. The anxious father, whose name was Samiy, consulted the wise woman of the village about a remedy.

"'Kill a cow,' she counselled, 'and bring to me one fat haunch together with the hide and horns. From these I will prepare incense for you to burn in the room where lies the child, for the demon dislikes the smell of hide and horn.'

"With a heavy heart the distraught father did as he was bid. He owned but one cow, for he was a poor man. What is more, he suspected that the wise woman would dine comfortably on beef that evening, and that the burnt offering to the demon would consist of horn and hide alone. Anyway, he took the incense, which he lit and placed near the sleeping child. For an hour or two all seemed well. Perhaps the evil smell had driven away the demon. The stench was bad enough to kill anything. The child sank into a coma, but the next morning the demon returned as powerful as ever, seizing the child by the throat until the anxious parents thought he must surely die.

"Once more Samiy visited the wise woman, who told him to catch a wild duck. With difficulty he did so, and bore the bird to his cottage. Holding the duck upside down over the baby, naturally it flapped its wings. This,

said the wise woman, would surely send the demon packing. No. It still clung to the child, until his face went black and his eyes started from their sockets.

"What could the wretched father do next? He did not visit the wise woman. She was obviously no good at coping with this particular kind of demon. Instead, he caught a wild monkey and teased it until it rushed angrily to attack the baby. Even this did not frighten the demon away.

"For me four sorts of men as types of weakness stand,
Since not a whit comes from the four:
The leech, the priest, star-wizard, and the sorcerer,
With drug, prayers, horoscope, and speed law.'"

groaned Samiy, as he watched his baby's convulsions.

"One evening he visited the local tea house, bemoaning his lot, when a friend put forward another suggestion.

"'Know you not,' he said, 'that the best means of killing a demon is to shoot it?'

"'Alas, how can that be?' sorrowfully answered Samiy. 'No one here has a gun.'

"'Listen to me,' replied his friend. 'Not three hours since, a Feringhee from the Benzine Company passed on his way for shootings, to kill pigs and ducks and geese. He will surely help you.'

"Clutching at the ray of hope, Samiy found the Englishman, who, concealing his incredulity, good-naturedly agreed to do his best. He had a look at the child to see if he could prescribe something both medicinal and of appeal to the demon superstition. Obviously the trouble was bronchial. Demons are well known to dislike both heat and yellow. So he advised the mother to rub the baby's chest with mustard oil. Then, to satisfy Samiy, he fired a couple of cartridges over the roof and went on his way.

"A month later he returned, and enquired after the child.

“‘Excellence,’ said Samiy, ‘may the blessing of Muhammad be upon you. After you left, we did as you bid. At first the demon fought, but gradually he grew weaker. The smoke of my house was like to vanish, when my fire would have died out for ever, but my wife continually rubs the yellow oil upon the baby’s chest. The demon is nearly vanquished. Peace be upon you.’

“The Benzine Feringhee went on his way back to his work in the oil-fields, where much of the wealth of Iran for long lay dormant beneath the surface, conserving riches beyond man’s wildest dreams.”

We were told that an eminent geologist refused to believe that oil could be there. Reluctantly he obeyed the request of the sheikh to see for himself. After a long trek over the domain, the geologist, adamant that his quest was in vain, sat down to rest. A few seconds later he moved his seat, disgusted to find he had been sitting in a puddle. Looking more closely he found the answer. The puddle was oil!

The First Exploitation Company originally acquired the rights over a square mile of land in Masjid-i-Suleiman where they sunk a well called M One. A pipe-line was begun in 1910 and finished seven years later.

Beyond the elaborate pipe system feeding the oil from the bowels of the earth to the shores of the Persian Gulf, tankers waited to take the fluid to fulfil its rôle in peace and war. The modern tanker developed as the result of long experience. The first small vessels were not replaced until demand became more insistent to transport as much as twenty thousand tons, the fleets an asset in the hands of the nations controlling them.

Before the war, the yearly output from Masjid-i-Suleiman was about eighty thousand tons, which rose to over five million tons in ’thirty-six. A few years ago the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, as it was then called, had a slight difference of opinion with the Shah, with the result

that the company and the Persian Government came to a better understanding than ever before. National aspirations and international interests materially improved. Neither shareholders nor the privy purse could complain. In one year the A.P.O.C. netted over three million pounds profit and paid twelve and a half per cent. on their ordinary stock. The Persian Government received over two million pounds revenue. No wonder the country bade fair to "get rich quick."

They showed us a well. We approached a fence enclosing a red-painted pipe topped with a valve in the centre, looking like an ugly village pump; unspectacular to say the least of it.

We passed a sign by the roadside announcing *Danger—Well Drilling In*. Farther on, significantly, we read *No Smoking*. A policeman confiscated our matches and lighters.

Geologists had calculated where oil should be; in a cone-shaped dome sandwiched between gas and salt water, and held in absorbent and fissured limestone. Work proceeded at the rate of about two feet an hour, by drillers on day and night shifts. They had already struck oil, but hoped, deeper down, to find a better quality. Above the well, drilled to a depth of nearly three thousand feet, towered a derrick. From half-way up, a wire pulley sloped gently to the ground, so that if the man at the top felt overcome with the gas ascending from the bowels of the earth, he could clamber into a basket and glide to safety.

Those who dwelt in Fields counted themselves fortunate above their friends condemned to endure the hot summers and short winters of Abadan. Workshops were reconditioning drilling-tools, gauges, and performing a hundred other jobs. Gauges worth a cool million could measure to one ten-thousandth of an inch. In the forge, a broad-shouldered Briton toiled at a glowing anvil. Indian teak wood was being fashioned into beds, chairs, tables, and

sofas. Yet only a few miles away, leopard and wolf roamed the forests.

The Temple of Solomon was a Zoroastrian Fire Temple. Probably the Eternal Fire derived fuel from oil seeping through the crust of the earth. All that remained were massive stone steps and a few crumbled walls and pillars. We did not even know for certain that it was the temple, for some authorities held it to be the dwelling-house of the priests.

"Legends so old that none knows whence they sprang," began Rumi, as we stopped for a breather, and sat upon the steps, "treat of the origin of Fire Worship, which existed long before Christ was thought of. Yet one legend hinges upon the pilgrimage of the Wise Men to your Christian saint Jesus.

"Three kings met at Sava, to find that they were all travelling with one object: to pay homage to a new-born Prophet. One of them, the eldest, came from Kashan; the second from Ava; and the youngest from Sava. They set forth together, their camels laden with gifts. Not unnaturally they discussed the new star in the firmament, what fashion of man he was, for only scanty data had filtered through to their distant kingdoms. Each had brought a different present. The king of Sava, being young, had chosen gold; he of Ava, frankincense; and the more thoughtful ruler of Kashan had brought myrrh.

"They decided to gauge what manner of man was the new prophet upon which gift he accepted. If he took the gold, he would be an earthly prince. If he rejected gold in favour of frankincense, he must be a god. If he set greatest store upon the myrrh, that would prove him to be a physician.

"When they arrived at Bethlehem, the kings enquired for the new prophet, and made their way to the rock-hewn stable.

" 'He lies within,' said a passer-by.

"The first to enter the humble stall at sunset, the opening of the Persian day, was the youngest king, he of Sava, bearing with him his gift of gold. His eyes met those of a youth of his own age, who accepted the present. The king of Sava withdrew, to give place to Ava, a man of substance, bearing frankincense. He saw a man of an age like unto his own, who graciously accepted the gift. Lastly, entered the eldest of the three kings, his silver beard rippling to his breast. Advancing to receive him came a dignified man of sixty. To him the old king dropped stiffly upon one knee and presented the myrrh.

"Outside, the three compared notes. What was their astonishment to find that their stories did not tally. Each said that he had been confronted by his counterpart. Long they debated how this thing could be. At length they decided to enter the cave together. He must surely look alike to the three of them at one and the same time.

"Yet another surprise lay in store. In the stable lay a baby, thirteen days old, cradled in a manger. Beside him were their offerings, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. With a gesture the baby intimated his acceptance and gave the donors a closed box which they carefully bore away. Not until they had travelled many days on the road did they lift the lid. Therein lay a stone, which, thinking they had been ridiculed, they hurled from them into a deep well, constructed for the use of devout pilgrims crossing the desert. The stone sank into the water far below. Straightway a flame from heaven entered into the well. This sign penetrated brains already perfumed with the scents of saints and prophets, whose rare perfections were perpetually chanted by birds of melodious notes, furnished with many pairs of wings; a perfume mixed with musk, which scented the celestial mansions of those who sang hymns in the ethereal sphere.

"The kings were overwhelmed. The stone was the rock of the new Faith of the Prophet to whom they had

rendered homage. Upon that rock they must stand firm. Carefully they took some of the flame to their own countries, where it burned brightly, tended by their descendants."

Rumi ceased. We could embellish the tale, having read Marco Polo's account of his travels. Marco said that on the return from Bethlehem the three kings stayed in Sava until they died, and that there they were buried, Sava thus becoming known as the City of the Three Maji.

"Yezd," volunteered Rumi, "means Praiseworthy, or Blessed, and later became the chief centre of Fire Worship. Upon the Mount of the Mansion of Fire the flame was kept alight for three thousand years."

He told us that Iran had many traditions in the Zendavesta, a collection of sacred works of which the most important and probably the oldest was the Vendidad, which expounded the three main principles of Zoroastrianism; that agriculture and cattle were the only noble callings; that creation was a war between good and evil; and that the elements, air, water, fire, and earth, were not made to be destroyed. Added to these was a vast ritual and much sound common sense. Fasting was forbidden. "Whoso eats not, has no power . . . it is by eating that the universe lives, and it dies by not eating."

One afternoon we drove to an almost perpendicular drop of nearly a thousand feet; and tightened our belt, breathing hard as we looked doubtfully upon a primitive funicular railway, gradient about one in two. However, our escort told us that our weight meant nothing to the wire rope which would wind us up and down. We stepped aboard a kind of pen, and descended between walls of red rock like the bastions of an ancient fortress. Streams coursed crystal clear down the snow-clad steeps. At last we reached the bottom, and drove along the spine of the valley past a group of Bakhtiari tribesmen squatting in a circle by the roadside, gambling. They were clad in baggy black trousers and open-throat shirts woven with tribal

markings, and wore soft white canvas shoes soled with compressed rags. A felt waistcoat and either a round skull cap, or what had once been a Pahlevi hat, completed the rig.

We came upon a fat pipe through which passed two million gallons of water every day, thread of life at Fields. Below, in a narrow rocky valley, ran the Karun River. Upon a point stood Honeymoon Cottage, a flower-filled garden running along each side of a crazy-paved path. The clear mountain air was heavy with the scent of wild stocks. We sipped cooling drinks, sitting on a small terrace high above the swift-flowing river. Sheep and goats strolled down the lazy stretch of sand upon the farther bank, to drink the ice-cold water emerging from a narrow sunless gorge, one side terraced in a flight of giant steps. A faint blue haze scented with wood-smoke floated towards us. If it be proof of gipsy ancestry to like that smell, our antecedents were confirmed. Nothing ever made us feel so youthful. What more to ask of any smell?

A caravan of ten men, eight goats and a donkey, made ready to cross the river. They produced whole sheepskins, still hairy, which they inflated through a leg. These were then lashed beneath thin straight branches to form a raft, upon which the goats, and four of the men armed with roughly-fashioned paddles, embarked to the tune of much spitting and shouting. The raft, called a *kellek*, was caught by the stream, swirled down, and steered towards the opposite bank by a lusty oarsman. Grounding in a sheltered cove, they all waded ashore. The skipper towed his craft upstream before re-crossing for the other half of the outfit—the rest of the men, one of whom held the donkey by the ears as it swam beside the raft.

Reluctantly we tore ourselves away, ascended the slide, and returned to Fields. Thence we motored to the landing-ground and took to the air again. The desert had dried

BY ORDER OF THE SHAH

somewhat since our advent, and the rivers looked like shiny black serpents sunning themselves on a grassy bank. Here and there a red flare blared over a hill crest. A ribbon road wound about the spurs.

We alighted for an hour or two at Haft Khel, the Seven Hills, as large an oil-field as Masjid-i-Suleiman. Starting off again, we sighted Ahwaz, once Alexander's chief port.

"The original name," said Rumi, "is a form of the Arabic *huz*, a body of people. Here milady built a bridge to ensure the arrival of her aquatic lover in a more presentable and less exhausted condition. Originally a prosperous district about the town was called Suq-al-Ahwaz, where were traces of a dyke built by a rich merchant who made a corner in sugar. He withheld his store until it would fetch a wickedly high price, then opened his sacks, which proved to contain nothing but huge black scorpions, so vindictive that, as they moved, their tails cut a thick carpet in two. So many scorpions were there that the inhabitants of the town fled, never to return."

In the time of the Caliphate, Ahwaz grew sugar, which thrived in the summer heat, and boasted a large sugar factory. At one time, too, the town was famous for silken carpets. A poet once compared his lady's cheeks to the smooth weaving of Ahwaz. Nasr-ud-Din Shah renamed the town Bund-i-Nasr-ud-Din, after himself. At that time it was said that the air of Ahwaz made people stupid, that of Mosul prudent, and that of Isfahan greedy.

All around we saw desert, separated from the Bakhtiari mountains by a long stubborn outcrop of rock. We flew on. In the hot sunshine, blue pools looked like Love-in-the-Mist, lazy borders edged with fluffy green. The Karun wound in and out, cutting the land into a jig-saw puzzle.

We alighted at Abadan for luncheon. Taking off again, the aeroplane turned her nose north-west, away from the forest of tanks and chimneys, for all the world like the ruins

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of Persepolis. Indeed we had to look closely upon one of the postage stamps commemorating the Firdausi millennium to determine that the picture showed the ruined columns of Darius's palace, and not Abadan!

We flew over Khorram-Shahr, fringed with palm trees; and over sandy oases. More or less following the Shatt-al-Arab, we passed over one or two big Arab estates, and above a rose garden in full bloom. Ocean-going dhows, running before the wind towards the Gulf, appeared to be mere sailing dinghies. We passed the west-bound Imperial Airways machine, speeding over farms which looked like queer little scratchings in the sand, as though children had drawn squares for noughts and crosses. Then came Basrah, stretching for several miles along the river bank, blue dome proclaiming the port directorate. Of the Basrawis, Sir Arnold Wilson said, "they are endowed with a mind as lofty as their date palms, hospitality as wide as their river, and society as sweet as their dates."

About half a mile beyond, where the Tigris and Euphrates joined to form the Shatt-al-Arab, we landed upon a runway of the new Basrah airport.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GULF OF PEARLS

ON another occasion we arrived at Basrah by the morning train from Baghdad. Upon the platform, waiting to escort us, stood Rumi, his face beaming in a smile nearly as wide as our own, so great was our mutual pleasure at meeting again. Seldom had we felt towards an Oriental as we did towards him. It may be that his sense of the ridiculous appealed to ours. It may be that his tolerance set him above his fellows, for even upon trying journeys he never got upon our nerves. We trust we did not unduly fray his. If we did, he was courteous enough to disguise the fact.

We drove through the bronze gates leading to the quayside, and stepped aboard the Gulf mail steamer.

Although winches screamed all day, so heavy was the consignment of dates that we did not sail until the middle of the night. That made us a day behind our schedule. At length the cranes creaked and groaned for the last time. To the tune of bell-ringing, shouting, and an attendant bustle, the S.S. *Varela* left the Margil wharf, and slid gently down the Shatt-al-Arab, river of dispute; 'Iraq on one bank, Iran on the other.

When we awoke the next morning, dawn had broken. The heads of the date palms reclined languidly, like those of beautiful women overcome with sleep. Through the morning mist the derelict palace of the Sheikh of Mohammerah looked imploringly at us; as though beseeching the return of the master, a virtual prisoner in Teheran. Wide steps, up which richly robed dignitaries once swept into a

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gracious reception hall, beneath an entrance of coloured mosaics shaped like the hood of a cobra, were falling piece by piece into decay and rubbish, cluttering the steps below.

Rumi told us a story of a peasant, who, when digging the foundations of a new house, came upon some ancient golden ornaments. When the Sheikh of Mohammerah heard of it, he at once had the treasure transferred to his own coffers; but his henchmen continued to pester the finder, saying they were come to lead him to execution. This so worked upon his imagination that he fancied he heard voices bidding him prepare for instant death or render the treasure. They drove him mad. Local autocrats were later forced willy-nilly to bow to the Shah. The past glory of Mohammerah faded.

The ship glided on. A sudden wind sprang up, ruffling the calm water.

"When this wind blows, it softens lute strings so that they will not keep in tune," remarked Rumi, resting his elbows upon the deck rail at our side. "We have an old superstition which says that in June and July, if a man breathe the hot south wind after it passeth over the Kerzereh flower, he will die.

' . . . like south winds through a fence
Of Kerzereh flow'rs came fill'd with pestilence.'

Along the Gulf this inflamed wind was known as the *samyah*, killing and blasting people as though stifling them. Bodies lost neither shape nor colour, but bits crumbled away at a touch."

He went on to tell us of a nobleman living at Kazerun, who once sent a courier with a letter to a friend in Bushire.

"The servant did not return, nor came an answer. He despatched a second servant who, as he rode down the mountain pass, was surprised to see his fellow lying by the roadside, asleep. He dismounted and touched him. To

his astonishment, flesh and clothes crumbled to dust. He had been blasted by the *samyah*."

The wind died down as suddenly as it had arisen, leaving the sunny deck of the *Varela* warm as a May morning on the Terrace at Monte Carlo.

We anchored a few miles upstream of Khorram-Shahr to spend almost the entire day there, until the flood tide carried us over the bar into the open gulf. Pliny said that Khorram-Shahr may have been the site of Pellacum, restored by Antiochus, who gave it his own name, before an Arab host under Pasines renamed it Charax-Pasina. Until recently the place was known as Mohammerah, a name with an Arabic flavour. The system for clearing cargo struck us as primitive, to say the least of it. Most of the packages were loaded by hand, where a simple crane would have saved untold labour and time. We watched coolies descend upon the cases, and handle them over runners which were then laboriously rolled one by one along the quay to the ship's side.

The *Varela* hove-to a few hundred yards upstream, to be besieged by *mahelas* from which she took aboard sacks of grain and mysterious bales, probably hides or wool, roughly shrouded in sacking labelled "Marseille." A fellow-traveller, an American, leaned over the rail beside us. He had spent seven years in Capetown and six in Jerusalem; but left after a difference of opinion with the Palestine Government. Although he looked worthy of concourse with nothing higher than a sweeper, he had decided to try the Government of Iran. We wondered how much he would try them.

Whither were we bound?

Bushire.

He grunted, and murmured something discouraging about the roads; whether impossible or impassable we could not, from his accent, discover. As it happened, they were both.

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Motor launches, *mahelas*, row-boats, and canoes fussed about the ship, waiting for the tide to carry her over the bar and into the open Gulf. Above the palm trees towered the masts of the Iranian navy, ships riding at anchor where the Karun River flowed into the Shatt. The *Tiger*, the admiral's flagship, steamed down the river, her green, white, and red flag superimposed with the Persian lion within a coronet of leaves.

Rumi told us how the Shah once inspected his navy.

"The Agent of Heaven in this World boarded a war-ship and expressed a wish to put to sea. He waited. Nothing happened. He sent someone to find out why the engines had not started. The messenger did not return. The Brother of the Moon sent another man. He disappeared also, as did a third. At last they all returned together with the captain, who explained that he had just discovered that the last admiral but three had sold the engines!"

Where we rode at anchor in our mail steamer, a statue of Riza gazed over the water. The busy *mahelas* finished their work and faded towards the shore. The occupant of a single canoe, outlined against the gathering dusk, dipped a spoon-shaped paddle into the smooth water. An oil-fed flame glared through the tree trunks, black smoke trailing away into the distance, mingling with the evening clouds of autumn, and seeming to stretch in full circle round the horizon. The ship weighed anchor and floated downstream past the lights of Khorram-Shahr twinkling through the trees beyond blackened ruins of the warehouses burned to the ground in the record summer of 1935. The voice of the quartermaster, as he swung the lead, mingled with the lapping of the quiet water. The flare leapt higher, illuminating the sky to a sullen red. Here and there the fringe of palms thinned to disclose a shore sandy and lifeless. The lights of Abadan twinkled through the evening haze. The headlamps of a car sped across the

desert. A red buoy proclaimed its winking presence almost beneath us, looking for a moment like an illuminated cross upon a war grave, in water nearly solid with brown mud. Quickly the darkness fell. Always the oil flare flamed in the background, reminder of turbulent, relentless forces disturbing the calm peace of the palms, an irregular frieze against a light sky.

The river took a deep bend towards the island of Abadan, electric lighting in street and house contrasting with the red-gold flare. A single daylight lamp shone so blue as to look almost green. The wharf lights, emerald and ruby, fell in long reflections over the water, like a golden ear-ring which adorned beauty five thousand years ago. Behind, chimneys in irregular groups reared heads. A launch silently brought pilot and mail bags alongside. Two British sloops, brilliantly lit, vied with the refinery to look like the Earl's Court Exhibition. We gathered way, past lights glimmering for miles in desultory fashion towards the open sea. The Chief Engineer strolled our way.

"Fifteen years ago," he said in the broad Scots accent we had learned to expect of a ship's engineer, "there was nobbut one sma' distilling plant."

For a brief moment we thought he dreamed of his native whisky, but he pointed to the oil refinery.

We awoke the next morning to find that during the short night we had passed the new Iranian port of Khor Musa, near Bandar Shapur. The sea was calm. The sun gently shone. The steward had just been round with "elevenses." As the ship came within sight of Bushire, Rumi leaned over the rail beside us again. He drew up a couple of deck chairs.

"There once was a time," he began.

We murmured polite encouragement.

"A fisherman called Mucki pushed out his boat from the very coast that you see beyond those waves. Such was

the odour of his occupation that he daily left the shore upon the sea of hardship. The breeze blew from the land so valiantly that he was soon some distance from the *nargileh* of his evening comfort. He judged the moment to cast his net. The crew lowered the heavy patched sail, set on its clumsy mast, and heaved the anchor overboard, before again turning to the net. It seemed heavy. Was there an uncommon large fish at the bottom? Pray to the gods that the net broke not. Beads of perspiration shone upon the fishermen's bronze foreheads, as they braced their feet firmly against the side of the boat. At last they hauled in, nearly falling backwards with the weight.

"To Mucki's astonishment, and not a little to his fear, no fish lay panting in the bottom of the boat, but a creature in the shape of a man, large and well made, limbs covered with thick hair like fur. Was this a visitation from a god? Best be reverent. All the monster said was, 'Houl! Houl!' Mucki decided that his catch was as frightened as himself. There seemed nothing to worry about, so fear turned to triumph. What a fine tale he would tell. What a brave fellow he was to capture such a monster! He addressed several remarks to his prize, who only shook his head and repeated 'Houl! Houl!'

"When they reached the shore, the catch was the nine days' wonder of the village. For want of a better name they called him Houl. He proved docile as a child, and as gentle. He hurt nobody, and was happiest when performing prodigious feats of manual labour. Over one thing only was he adamant. He would never set foot in a boat. Once Mucki tried to coerce him to go fishing. Houl refused violently, and showed a glimpse of the immense strength lying dormant at the command of that slow-moving brain.

"One day, when Houl was tending the flocks on the steep cliffs above the village, a horde of Persian bandits, clad in armour and riding richly caparisoned horses,

galloped over the hill. With blood-curdling cries they descended upon him. Roused at last, he forsook his leisurely mien. Armed only with a shepherd's crook, he laid about him, felling the two nearest warriors. He sprang at another, unhorsed him, and killed him with a single blow. Time and again he triumphed, until the noise and shouting attracted the attention of the villagers mending their nets in the sheltered cove below. Amazed, they crept near the scene to watch spellbound, until all but one of the Persians was killed; a big man clad in shining armour, and obviously the leader. He dismounted and closed with the nearly exhausted Houl. Long and fiercely they wrestled, now one gaining an advantage, now the other, until Houl's great strength proved victorious, and the Persian warrior lay on the ground, his back broken.

"The villagers, seeing his success, rushed forth to greet their champion, and carried him shoulder high. The fighting over, he beamed all over his face, radiating amiability, not fully realizing the service he had rendered by saving them from the onslaught of the raiders.

"Possessed of the armour and horses, clothing and accoutrements of his fallen foes, Houl became a wealthy man, and, according to village standards, an eligible bachelor. Mucki therefore gave him his eldest daughter in marriage. They had four sons, each of whom inherited the strength of their father, and formed the nucleus of the tribe of Ben Houl, rich and lawless. Because of their great strength they had complete power over anyone with whom they came in contact.

"You may not know that the Quran declares it unlawful to plunder the living.

"'Very well,' argued the children of Houl, 'we will wait until they are dead. And what is more, we shall not wait long. We will kill them ourselves. The Quran permits us to strip the dead.'"

Rumi paused, to see how we had taken his story.

Finding interest still imprinted upon our face, he pointed to the distant shore, where a tall minaret lurched crookedly above a cluster of mud hovels.

"That village," he said, "was once a prosperous town, her citizens engaged in fishing for pearls. Equipped only with a clip upon the nose, they would drop over the side of a dhow built in the Red Sea."

We judged these boats to be about a hundred feet long and thirty wide. They were undecked, save for a small platform fore and aft. Rubble was rammed between the two layers of planks forming the sides, which were joined by wooden pegs instead of nails and bolts, and lashed by coir rope sunk into grooves. Sails were of strong matting; anchors usually of heavy African timber.

"Those who sailed the vessels," said Rumi, "were not always care-free. Not only had they to compete with the elements, but superstition, present with seafaring men the world over, played a part. Sometimes the masters abhorred the Devil, and supposed him hot on their heels, like the Chinese aboard their junks. They would sail slap across the bows of another ship, that the Devil might be cut in two, for a big ship under way cannot easily avoid their byplay. All the more sure then was the Devil to be caught."

Rumi went on to tell us about the divers. When they came up, the oysters were put into a common heap in the boat to be prised open, that no man might know whether he had found the finest pearl on record or nothing at all. This ensured that morale was not undermined.

"The floor of the Gulf has ever been studded with pearls, which do not peel like those from Ceylon," he went on, "and lose but one-hundredth part a year, of colour and water, for fifty years, after which they cease to lose anything. Divers are apt to break out in sores and suffer from weak eyes. They can remain under water for five minutes, if they oil their ears, put a clip upon their noses, and eat only dates and light food. They can dive to ten

or fifteen fathoms. Rain in plenty means a good season, for rain over the sea is supposed to aid an oyster's digestion, and to enhance the size and value of the pearl."

The fear of the divers was the dawl, a sort of jelly-fish about the size of a hand with long sinews which burned the flesh. The dawl melted away if exposed to the heat of the sun.

"It has not been possible to steal from our kings," said Rumi, when questioned about the value of the fishery. "Even the sea is obliged to restore what it takes from them, if not in kind, then in pearls, the anchor of the vessel of victory and fortune."

We agreed with him, thinking of the crown of Nadir Shah, a tall and elaborate affair covered entirely with pearls.

"Pearls are the cold tears of the moon, which have fallen into the sea, to be guarded by the oysters until they are needed to deck a chieftain's bride.

"'Tis moonlight over OMAN's sea;
Her banks of pearl and palmy isles
Back in the night beam beauteously,
And her blue waters sleep in smiles.'"

quoted Rumi in reflective vein, although the sun shone in benign radiance.

"When that village entered the open portals of the Hall of Prosperity," he went on, pointing to the same cluster of mud houses in the distance, "the people decided that they must build them a mosque with a minaret. If you would like the voice of my mind to sing to the harp of my memory, I will tell you why the minaret leans over.

"Everybody knows that Christians date their years from the birth of Christ. But everyone, including my lowly self, does not believe in him as a Supreme Being. We contend he was but a prophet of God, and not the greatest at that. Millions hold that Muhammad was God's

only prophet, and count their centuries from the date of his flight more than six hundred years after the time when Christ lived upon the earth. One link between the two great religions is that the Christian rings a bell at the top of a tower when the hour of prayer draws nigh, and the Muhammadan climbs a tower to call his flock to worship by word of mouth.

"Many years ago, when Muhammad was still alive, his zealous followers living in the village you see before you, decided, in religious fervour, to erect another mosque. They discovered that the only builder worth his salt was a Christian. But as the mosque was important for their well-being, they grudgingly gave the contract to the Unbeliever. It was all very well for them to say they did not like a Christian to build their mosque, but what of his feelings? He was not particularly keen on working for Muhammadans. Religious intolerance being what it was, he was unpopular. Indeed, he was told that if he refused to work of his own free will, he would be forced to, and might be tortured to death into the bargain. Anyhow, they would not pay him, let him understand that at the outset.

"'Oh, well,' thought he; 'it is all in the day's work, I suppose. I must make the best of a bad business.'

"He started to build the mosque. For a time all went well, and the Muhammadans decided that they wanted him to build more mosques. Time enough to kill him later. The mosque completed, he began upon the minaret, which rose slowly; ten feet, twenty feet, to the first balcony.

"'One for the Father,' murmured the Christian as he laid brick upon brick.

"Another fifteen feet, and came a second balcony.

"'One for the Son,' thought he, as the tower mounted higher.

"He downed tools at dusk as usual, and trudged home. As soon as it was dark, out he went again. Arriving at the

mosque, he climbed quietly up the minaret and set to. The moon rose, enabling him to work the faster. Nothing ruffled the silence, save the tap and scrape of his mason's trowel. When dawn broke, he straightened his back.

"'And one for the Holy Ghost,' he murmured to himself.

"Some hours later passers-by glanced up to see the builder at work as usual. Surely there had not been three balconies round the minaret yesterday. They were annoyed. Muhammadans do not like three of anything. Three spells the Trinity, a Christian symbol.

"'What is this?' they asked. 'Why are there three balconies? We only expected two. We do not like the number three, as you know.'

"On they stormed, accusing the Christian of mixing his religion with theirs. He answered them with smiling confidence.

"'You may think and do what you please. I will not change the minaret. If you kill me, it will never be finished, for there is no builder here who can balance tiles upon a roof as I do. Your city ruler is the third of his line. This is the third year of his reign. The minaret has three balconies.'

"He turned, climbed the tower, and quietly went on with his work.

"The Muhammadans did not know what to think, although they said a great deal in loud and angry voices. True, their city ruler was the third of his line, and he had begun to rule three years before. Possibly the balconies were a polite compliment to him. Yet they had an uncomfortable feeling that the Christian was pulling their leg.

"A few years passed, and the incident was forgotten. The builder was executed. He was forgotten too. Muhammad died. Soon afterwards he ascended to heaven. Every minaret came to hear the sad news of their Lord's

death, and agreed, when his soul floated upwards, to bend their heads like the rest of Islam, in reverent sorrow, until a sign proclaimed that he had been received into Paradise. Not until then would they resume their normal stance.

"Obediently, and with one accord, they bowed their heads. The minaret with three balconies hung hers with the others until the blood rushed to her face. She awaited the sign with what patience she could muster. What ages the Prophet's soul took to go to Paradise! How did it travel? Upon a red velvet cushion with golden tassels, borne aloft by two white angels? Or had it wings to fly alone? She was feminine, this minaret, and young; and, you will remember, she had a Christian upbringing. These together proved too much for her. Quietly she raised her head to see for herself. What met her eyes no one will ever know, but it was enough to transfix her. Which is why that minaret now fading behind us has a double kink, symbolizing the bow to Muhammad's soul, and the fact that much as Lot's wife looked back, the minaret looked up.

"Gradually the pearling trade from this town moved across the Gulf to the Arabian coast. The minaret still stands, although few worshippers now bend back and knees in the mosque beneath, in response to the muezzin's call."

Rumi stopped. Distant mountains arose from the horizon. A hundred small sails put out to proclaim Bushire. Our steamer had to tie up at the outer anchorage, seven miles from the shore.

"Smaller ships," said Rumi, "can approach a couple of miles or so nearer, but the coast is so shallow that even motor launches have to skirt the bar at low tide."

A fleet of *mahelas*, sails set, reached the ship and began the usual shouting and loading, heaving up and down in the growing swell. An Iranian family, father, small boy, and mother dragging one child and carrying another, descended the gangway to an empty boat. They settled

themselves and their packages, laughing and talking excitedly. We strolled aft to see if our promised launch had materialized. Ten minutes later we saw that family again. They looked as if they had been boned and filleted, lying draped about a handy kerosine oil tin, mute and miserable, responding volubly to every heave of the boat. We stepped thankfully into the comfort of the launch and made for the shore, an angry sky darkening behind us. Lightning forked into the sea. Thunder rolled. As though by common consent the *mahelas* furled their sails and prepared for a squall. We reached the jetty and raced for the car as the first indolent drops fell.

Bushire, one of Iran's main ports, had no harbour. The name was corrupted, probably by an English sailor, from Abu Shahr, Father of Cities. We drove between buildings huddled in disorderly fashion, high by low, shabby near new. A heap of mud overlooking the seashore was all that remained of a Portuguese fort, which once had twelve towers, two serving as formidable gate-posts, flanked by brass cannon. Appearances counted for little, because on the first and only occasion upon which the gun was fired the shock caused the flanking walls to fall flat, exposing the garrison, aghast at the calamity, to the fury of the besiegers.

"A Bushiri woman went to England," said Rumi, "as a nursemaiden. When she returned, she told her friends of the lovely gardens, the fine clothes, houses, and motor cars.

" 'They are all wonderful,' said she, 'but England lacks one thing. There is not a single date tree.'

"Her friends went away marvelling that it was possible to live in a land devoid of palms."

A certain Sheikh of Bushire, when he wanted to call men to his aid, would send forth a camel carrying two large cauldrons of *pillau*, a dish of boiled chicken and rice spiced with Sultanabad raisins. The jolting of the camel

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caused the ladles to clang against the iron sides of the cauldrons. Everyone who had at some time or another tasted the hospitality of the sheikh rallied to this, his call to arms.

"Ten years ago," said Rumi, "Bushire had thirty thousand inhabitants. Now there are perhaps fifteen thousand, and that is counting the goats. The others left before the slump, or have drifted away as best they could, bankrupt."

The German agent, Wassmuss, a thorn in the British side during the war, went in 1909 as German Consul to the Gulf. Transferred to Bushire four years later, he changed his overbearing manner for that of a diplomat. Steeping himself in the ways of the country, he became beloved of the Persians, and was responsible for training them with the object of invading India, and for stirring up trouble for the British in Fars.

We drew up at the Consulate-General in Sabzabad village, seven or eight miles away, and watched the rain falling upon the panting garden. Good for the plants, no doubt, but we could not help thinking of the Mashela, low-lying waste land between Bushire and the rest of Iran, ready to become a quagmire on the slightest provocation. A telephone enquiry confirmed our fears. Useless to start that day.

Rumi settled himself down to the passive habit of generations, seated upon the floor, cross-legged. He asked if he might smoke, and called for his *nargileh*. He was not going to allow us to start on our tour in complete ignorance.

"My country's freeboard upon the Gulf," he began, "and her obvious rights in the Caspian, have long given her claim to consider herself a maritime nation, which her history confirms. Maybe the progenitor of our navy was none other than the shark of Procopius, who, you may remember, fell in love with an oyster and sought her hand all the way up the Gulf, only to see her violated by a

British sailor. Did not Nearchus sail an entire fleet from India at the request of the Great Alexander? Nadir Shah built ships thereon, and was going to base more in the Caspian, with John Elton as his English Admiral, but he died before his plans matured."

Rumi evidently attached significance to the history of his country on the occasion when three ships, the *Fox*, the *Dolphin* and a Patamar boat, set out from Bombay to explore a sea scarcely traversed since the days of Alexander. Thereafter the Gulf awoke European attention. Consequent upon local strife and a prolonged siege of Herat, in the autumn of 1838, Persia acceded to British demands. But petty annoyances continued. A year later H.M.S. *Wellesley* landed some bluejackets. The Persians opened fire. Thereafter, England refused to accept their envoy at Court, although two years later a commercial treaty was signed at Teheran. Despite this, they again advanced on Herat. The Persian fat was then well in the British fire. The representative at Teheran hauled down the Union Jack and decided to withdraw the Mission. The Shah was infuriated and wrote to England: "Last night we read the paper written by the English minister plenipotentiary, and were much surprised at the rude, unmeaning, disgusting, and insolent tone and purport. The letter which he before wrote was also impertinent. We have also heard that, in his own house, he is constantly speaking disrespectfully of us and of you. . . ." He went on to make allegations about the British officials then in Teheran, accusing the minister of a liaison with the wife of a Persian official. This attitude was so impossible that the Governor-General of India declared war. Soon afterwards Sir James Outram arrived to join General Stalker at Bushire, where they entrenched a camp.

The troops routed the Persians near Borasjan and returned to Bushire. Then came the battle of Khooshab, when the Governor, a prisoner in British hands, tried to

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attract the attention of his friends upon the opposing side by waving his black cap on a stick, according to an eyewitness, but "was, very properly, knocked off his horse, and forced to remain on his knees."

General Stalker committed suicide. A week later the Naval Commander-in-Chief shot himself, no one knew why. Perhaps over-anxiety. Outram assumed command. A naval engagement took place, after which British redcoats landed near Mohammerah, only to find the entire Persian army had fled, having abandoned tents and equipment. Outram decided to pursue them by river as far as Ahwaz. When he got there, nine or ten thousand Persians mistook the small British force of three hundred men for an advanced guard, and withdrew after a slight brush, abandoning their supplies. The British loaded the boats with grain and sheep, and gave what they could not carry to the starved inhabitants, returning to Mohammerah to find that peace had been signed in Paris exactly a month before. Thus was British prestige clearly established.

In those times lions roamed the shores of the Gulf. Whales abounded, the bones being used in the coastal villages to revet houses, for timber was both scarce and expensive. Whales gave place to sharks and yellow water snakes which basked on the sunny surface.

So much Rumi told us, and more. The rain persisted. A fine old tom-cat sought our sympathy, purring across the parquet floor. Rumi picked him up.

"Cats," said he, stroking it gently, until we thought it would burst with purring, "cats indulge themselves in the highest qualities."

"And in the lowest," we ventured.

"In the sublime dignity of resolution," he went on, "they combine courageous independence with insulated happiness."

The gurgle of his *nargileh* alternated with his voice when he ceased talking to take a pull.

"The best cats come from Kurdistan and are larger than those from Angora," he continued. "Would your Excellence like to know how the cat first came to Persia?"

Rumi found it hard to forsake the name he had known all his life for one so unpoetic and matter of fact as Iran.

The D.P. was not fond of cats. They were a sore point with him at the best of times. However, he was prepared to play, and went so far as to welcome any topic, so long as it enhanced the peace around us. Rumi rose, abstracted a second cushion from the couch, tucked it beneath him, took a long pull at his *nargileh*, and began.

"A poor widow living on the coast of Arabia," he said, "had three sons, who dissipated her meagre pittance. When they could abstract nothing more from her, for there was no more, they lived riotously, with ribald companions, upon the island of Qais in the Persian Gulf, leaving their mother sorrowing and penniless. She dwelt in a hut more confined than the minds of the ignorant, darker than the tombs of misers. Her only companion was a cat, from the mirror of whose imagination the appearance of bread had never been reflected, who walked proudly and cloaked the poverty of her mistress. Of all God's creatures only one cannot be made a slave—the cat. If man could be crossed with the cat, man would improve but the cat would deteriorate.

"Now it was the custom, when a merchant set sail for a trading voyage, to take commissions from his friends. One sent sacks of grain, another entrusted him with handicraft, a third with gold; bidding him bring back silks and spices from the distant country whither the ship was bound. One such merchant was preparing to set sail from the village where lived the widow. He told her that if she could send something, anything, he would sell it and return to her the proceeds. But such was her distress, what could she send? She cast her eyes round the poverty-

stricken hut. There was nothing. She sat down and wept. Her tears flowed unchecked until she felt a gentle tug on her skirt. There stood her faithful cat, a fine grey puss, with long, soft fur and luminous yellow eyes.

"‘Alas, Tink-i-Poo,’ she cried brokenly. ‘What can I do? I have no milk for you, nor any means of sustenance for myself.’

"Tink-i-Poo continued to rub against her leg, purring loudly. At that moment her merchant friend came to say good-bye before departing on his long and hazardous voyage.

"‘What have you ready for me?’ he asked. ‘That which you give me will I sell, and bring back to you its value in the highest market I discover.’

"Her sobs broke out afresh.

"‘Ayee,’ she sighed. ‘I have nothing to send.’

"The merchant glanced round the cottage. An idea struck him.

"‘Entrust to me your cat!’ he exclaimed. ‘I will take her. Who knows, I may sell her handsomely. If not, I will bring her back to you. At least she will be well fed and cared for aboard my ship. If she remains with you she will but waste away.’

"The widow-woman saw the force of his argument. With many sighs and tears she watched the ship sail away. When it was lost to view, she turned her back upon the sea, packed her possessions into a bundle, locked the door of the hut, and trudged off to look for work. After weeks, nay months, of fruitless search, she at last returned; ill from want of proper nourishment, and sick at heart, for she was old and worn, and nobody had need of her. Where she had been born and bred, at last she found gentle employment, which brought enough to keep starvation from knocking too loudly at the door. Of her unmannerly sons she heard nothing. They recked not of their mother, nor of the morrow. They were too busy doing as they willed

upon the island of Qais, which, in their licentiousness and through their villainy, they had made their own.

"Meanwhile, what of Tink-i-Poo?"

"She enjoyed her life aboard the merchantman. Better fed than she had been for years, she ingratiated herself with the owner of the ship to such an extent that he gave her a silken cushion upon which to lie, and the best of everything to eat. They called at ports here and there, until they rounded the Oman Peninsula and sailed into the Gulf. Hearing tales, many and varied, about the richness and culture of a port called Bandar Abbas, which rose to greatness, and indeed gained its name under the ægis of our omnipotent Shah Abbas, the Arab merchant set his course that way, and dropped anchor opposite a fine panorama of spacious buildings. After complying with the normal formalities, he arrayed himself in his richest attire, and stepped into a small boat to go ashore. The Governor of the city met him with the courtesies due to a man of rank, conducting him to the palace where a fine banquet awaited them. When he entered the hall, the Arab merchant with difficulty concealed his surprise at the sight before him. Everyone present, richly arrayed, wore long hair and a flowing beard. The nobles from Georgia, of whom there were many, could be distinguished by their trim Imperials and immensely long whiskers, so lengthy that with ease they could tuck them behind the ears for greater convenience during meals.

"The salient fact which struck the Arab guest of honour about each gentleman was that all hair and beards and whiskers were enclosed within golden filigree cases. He did not remark upon this quaint fact, but marvelled within himself. The use of these cases soon became apparent. When the repast, in large trays of gold, was placed upon the tables, from every nook and cranny came mice, to fall upon the food with avidity. Every nobleman, as had already remarked the merchant, carried a sprocket, almost

a knobkerry, with which each laid about him heartily. So agile were the mice that they evaded every blow. The purpose of the shields was soon made clear, for the fearless mice tried their utmost to nibble and nest in the luxuriant hair beneath. When everyone had snatched such morsels of food as did not fall to the lot of an enterprising mouse, came the usual speeches of welcome. The Arab guest's reply contained that which infused hope into the minds of the Persians.

"'Most honoured Sirs,' said he. 'Far be it from me to say, or indeed to notice, anything but good of your most illustrious land. Nevertheless, I cannot but see the unfortunate plague of mice that besets you. I would not venture publicly to remark thereon, were it not that I am in the position to suggest a remedy. I have in my ship a small decorative creature which can rid you of your pest. During this Lucullan repast, I took the liberty of sending for her, and I have her here now. I should appreciate the opportunity of demonstrating her prowess.'

"Receiving polite, although perhaps incredulous encouragement from his hosts, he turned to a servant and took from him an oval wicker basket. He unfastened the lid, and out jumped Tink-i-Poo.

"She pounced at the nearest mouse, and felled it with one blow of her paw. Then another. And another. The whole table was littered with dead mice before she stopped for breath. Overjoyed to find herself once more beyond the confines of a ship, she wreaked heavy toll upon the mousy fraternity. Hosts and guests alike were amazed and overjoyed. The Governor rose to the occasion.

"'Tell me,' he said, 'what manner of beast this be, for all I have dreamed of, she fulfils. To purchase her we will gladly give the golden shields protecting our hair, our whiskers, and our beards.'

"So saying, he unfastened his own cases, and laid them before the Arab. The nobles applauded long and loud.

They too tore off their golden shields until a goodly pile lay upon the floor of the banqueting hall. This gesture not only displayed faith in the marvellous new animal, but was a pretty compliment, for hair upon the face was greatly esteemed, and the owners risked much by exposing it. Why, one John de Castro, a famous Governor of Goa, in order to raise a loan from the citizens, offered as security one of his highly prized moustaches, which was instantly honoured as the pledge of a gentleman.

"The merchant, overjoyed to have concluded so excellent a bargain for his friend the widow, accepted the offer. Shortly afterwards, having sold his remaining merchandise, he loaded the gold upon his ship, weighed anchor, and steered a homeward course. On his arrival, he hastened to acquaint the widow of her fortune. She hardly believed her ears. Straightway upon perceiving the narrative of the trader to bear the tangible imprint of truth, she sent to her sons, telling them of her luck. In rude haste they came to enjoy her considerable wealth, taking her to their island, and starting a shipping trade themselves, founded with her riches.

"Such was their business acumen that they not only had merchandise entrusted to them; but twelve whole ships, filled to the brim, joined their fleet for safe convoy. Callously, they slew the owners, appropriated the ships, and then purchased all the cats in Arabia, taking them to Persia, where each fetched a Shah's ransom.

"Thus came the cat to my country, which, thought the schoolboy, gained its name from the cat's purr."

His story over, the D.P. nicely asleep, our appetite whetted, we told Rumi of another theory about the origin of the cat.

"Certain peoples," we said, "declare that Christ and Muhammad had an argument. History does not relate the subject of the discussion, nor does it say how Muhammad, who lived over six hundred years after Christ,

managed to meet him. Explain it how you please. Anyway, during the argument, which threatened to become somewhat heated, Muhammad spat out a rat. Immediately, and not to be outdone, Christ spat out a cat, which devoured the rat of Islam."

As we ceased, the butler came in, and said that Rumi was wanted outside. He was absent for a few minutes, and came back with a worried look on his face.

"Alas, Excellence," he said. "The sorrow of desolation is upon me, but I cannot accompany you upon your travels to-morrow. One with whom I have been associated for many years has been gathered to the City of Silence but an hour ago. I have sent his family my best condolences, but I must remain to see him earthed. I will follow you one day later."

He bowed low and retired, presumably to make arrangements for the "earthing."

CHAPTER IX

THE MOUNTAIN STAIRCASE

YE Gods, how it rained.

"You can't possibly go to-day," said our host. "If you had arrived yesterday, as you intended, it would have been all right. We had no rain until this morning. The roads will be impassable by now."

Not to be turned from our purpose, at five the next morning we collected our scattered senses and wrapped the D.P. into his overcoat and rugs, to prepare for the mountain heights we hoped soon to climb. We gave a pretty girl a lift into the town, whence she wanted to sketch the angry dawn.

"I feel like Young Lochinvar," said the D.P. "Wish you weren't here."

We felt the same, but were not equal to an argument at five o'clock in the morning.

"Two's company, Sir," we said significantly. "Would you like me to drop her first, and come back for you?"

He snorted.

"What? Leave this innocent child to your nefarious designs? This sweet young lamb to a sheep in wolf's clothing?"

"Mary will not mind, Sir," we ventured hopefully.

"Mary? How d'you know her name is Mary, you young rascals?"

"Intuition, Sir," we replied vacantly.

The D.P. as a saviour of innocent maidenhood was in his element. Obviously we were not going to be allowed

in ours. We all drove off together. Our only bond with the driver was that he wore our old school tie. He told us his name was Napoleon, for the scarcely relevant reason that his mother had once been to France. An Iranian, he had the rare trait of combining energy with honesty. As a youth he had applied himself to learning English and French, when he and his brother started a garage in Alexandria. They soon made money. Then his troubles started. A little Jewess took his fancy. He showered his spare time and all his money upon her. He was proud of her, and not a little in love. Despite the objections of his family he persisted in the liaison, until his brother remonstrated, saying that if he insisted upon shaming them all they would have to dissolve the partnership. Napoleon, quick tempered, drew his revolver and shot his brother, happily not seriously. As he told us his eyes shone with fury. His huge frame shook and he banged his fist upon the side of the car.

"I gave that girl everything, and what d'you think? I caught the dirty little bitch coming out of the cinema arm in arm with another man. I shot at her too. I didn't hit her. I would have shot him but he ran away. I never went back. I went to America with the Ford Company. There I assembled their cars. They were pleased with me. I would be there now but, unfortunately, I became covered from head to foot with x-x-ma. No doctor could do anything for me. Eventually one told me that unless I returned to my own country I would not recover. The Ford Company sent me home via Paris. In one day a French doctor cured me. He covered my face with mud, then took it all off, my skin with it. He said I should never have any more trouble. He was right. I returned here, and have remained ever since. I have a nice new wife and two new children."

We passed through Bushire and on to the Shiraz road, stopping by the fitful light of a lantern to show our pass-

ports to a youthful policeman who, surprisingly, spoke both English and Urdu. He wrote several things in a little notebook, charged us eight *rials* (two shillings) for leaving Bushire (or for entering the province of Fars, we did not gather which) before allowing us to proceed.

A glorious dawn was rapidly throwing off the darkness. Regretfully we bade farewell to Mary, who, with her easel, we left to mercies nothing like as tender as those with which we had sought to charm her. A few drops of rain pattered on the roof of the car. Our hearts seized. Lightning flashed. Came an answering roar of thunder. In spite of everything, the sun peered over the hill like the brilliant smile of a hostess concealing deficiencies. Two concentric rainbows shone so brightly that when we looked away we saw half a dozen more imprinted over the sky. The rain came down harder.

Separating Bushire from the rest of Iran lay a low marshy strip of land called the Mashela. Across this ran a raised road, which the authorities chose to repair while we were there. We were thus forced to seek the muddy desert track. Muddy? We stuck thirteen times. It took us nine hours to cover forty miles. The more the wheels spun, the more we swore. The thought of mud was so irreconcilable with "Persia's full and fawn-like ray."

We turned to one side into low-lying mud which looked like flabby milk chocolate. We stuck again.

"So this is Iran!" we exclaimed, as the wheels settled into a comfortable bed.

"One of the chief advantages of travel," murmured the D.P. reflectively, "is that you reach your destination sooner than you otherwise would."

The sky grew lighter, but the rain pattered down like the yatter-yatter of a nagging wife. Great slanting drops fell upon us. We smirked at one another. After a couple

THE MOUNTAIN STAIRCASE

of hours we were able to drive on, at least launched upon our tour; rather too literally, in fact. We carried a kind of footman, whom we named Horrible, clad in dirty blue dungarees and a straw hat. He and Napoleon had attached a basket to the luggage carrier, which, whenever we stopped, swept into the car an odour of very dead fish, no longer fanned by the breezes of motion.

Horrible reluctantly descended and slithered about in the mud, collecting armfuls of camelthorn to stuff under the wheels. At length he trudged off into the distance and produced four stalwarts armed with spades. They looked a motley crew, but they soon dug us out. Once was nothing like enough. In two hours we covered half a mile. At last we reached mud which looked slightly more solid, so we dispensed with all but one of the gang, a bit of a wag, judging by the roars of laughter his sallies provoked. He wore a small felt skull-cap, and trousers of no recognized pattern which seemed to have been made for a man of enormous girth and microscopic calves. The tail of his shirt, unlike that of his countrymen, but like most Indians', hung outside his trousers, beneath a black and white striped cotton coat.

We stuck again. Horrible slipped in the mud for the fourth time.

"He'll dirty his front side next," said the D.P.

To the right, rugged mountains ranged in a semi-circle. To the left, clusters of palm trees promised conventional oases in their distance.

Napoleon drew up at a dilapidated mud hut which he dignified by the name of tea-shop. Here the paid hand left us with unintelligible protestations of (we supposed) undying friendship, no doubt engendered by our tip. Napoleon and Horrible paddled in for tea. A caravan of donkeys and ponies, heavily laden with sodden bags of grain, slithered past. A kite flapped drearily from a

telegraph post. Thank Heaven the rain had stopped at last. Surrounded by a sea of mud and camelthorn, the D.P. alighted to stretch his legs; incongruous in grey tweed suit, black Homburg hat, and carrying a smart silk umbrella. As he strolled away, a handkerchief, which he had tucked beneath a rain-soaked patch in the knee of his trousers, slipped into the mud. He trod on it. It was the only clean one unpacked. . . .

When we recovered our equilibrium, we called our minions and continued on our way, to the same sickening whirr of wheels going round and round but not always forwards. The car lurched and swayed until it climbed on to the main highway. Birds flew about, blue, yellow, green, and brown. The world became suddenly brighter. We passed Borazjan, a square fort flanked by high corner turrets, crouching beneath the mountains. We bumped and bounced across a barren open plain, where goats and sheep eked out a precarious existence. The D.P. waxed wroth against the waywardness of the surface.

"It is iniquitous," he spluttered, "that a mere track should be marked as a first-class road upon a map made and printed in England by English craftsmen for English travellers. I shall write to *The Times* about it when I get back."

Everywhere the peasants, with light one-donkey-power ploughs, scratched the stony soil, which gave out a rich earthy smell after the rain. At last we reached more solid ground. What a road! We filled the radiator with water and began the long ascent. We would have liked to see the security of anything between us and eternity as we climbed the sixty-nine hairpin bends. At one place we looked over the side and counted eleven roads winding above and below. Pliny wrote that this was "where the mountains are ascended by a steep flight of stairs." Fearsome in our day, what must the journey have been

THE MOUNTAIN STAIRCASE

like in his? Until a year or two ago cars had to reverse several times to circumnavigate the bends. Indeed, although the road had been slightly widened, lorries still had to reverse round the narrow corners, the most frightening we had met anywhere. The surface was greasy. There was not a vestige of a parapet. Only here and there could an oncoming vehicle pass with safety. Every now and then the stones of a graveyard loomed significantly through the gathering dusk. Some of the road had been cut out of high cliffs, that the kings of old might journey the more easily between their royal palaces. Alexander passed by on his march from India, through Gedrosia, across the Lut desert, or Sea of Lot, so called because it is salt encrusted like the country round the Dead Sea.

At the summit of the pass we stopped for a breather. The sunset gilded tier upon tier of bare hills. Our eyes found a familiar sight at our very feet, in the orange peel of the ubiquitous tripper. Even here. . . .

To hearten himself Napoleon sang in a crooning falsetto. His song? He translated it roughly for our benefit as we descended the twisting way:

“To whatsoever place I come,
In whatsoever house I lodge,
With water o’ mine eyes I write:
Beloved, empty is Thy place.”

“Whitherso’er my lonely wand’rings lie,
Upon the white-walled caravanseraï
This with the water o’ mine eyes I write:
Beloved, O! that it were Thou and I.”

We followed a stony stream broadening into a wide river, where the rocks, half sunk beneath the water, looked like the snouts of crocodiles. Round a bend we came upon Valerian’s Bridge, a grand pile of seven stone arches,

commanded by a fort, fallen into ruin but patrolled by a blue-clad sentry pacing the crumbling roof. Here and there huge boulders had hurtled down the slopes, threatening the safety of the road; or had crashed into the stream beneath, where the green rushes made a pall to cover their nakedness.

The way rose violently and roughly. Upon a particularly bad corner, old tombstones formed a ragged wall, supposed to prevent cars from crashing into the depths beneath, but serving as a grim reminder of what had happened to erring drivers in the past, and of what might occur again. Up and down the mountains we see-sawed, and through a fine cultivated plain, girt by serrated hills coloured with the quality of amber and cornelian strata like a gathered crinoline. Girl children in scarlet skirts and crimson tunics, patterned with the same designs as those of their ancestors, tended flocks of sheep and goats. We disturbed several thousand sandgrouse feeding upon the young crops. Forbidden to wear the erstwhile compulsory Pahlevi cap, the peasants had clapped upon their heads whatever they found cheapest. Several consignments of shoddy sun-hats had evidently found their way into Iran, probably smuggled from India through Afghanistan upon the backs of camels. Having encountered rough treatment and rain, they had lost all pretence at stiffening, and hung limp about the wearers' ears. We wound on. Darkness descended.

"I am not going to climb any blasted mountain passes in the dark," announced the D.P. "We will stop at Kazerun."

We conveyed this to Napoleon, who did not appear too pleased and muttered something about Shiraz. We drove on. Privately we thought, and if truth be told we hoped, that he had missed Kazerun and was going all out for Shiraz, but we wronged him. A feeble light shone through the darkness.

"There is no hotel," murmured Napoleon.

"Go to the Headman's bungalow," we commanded.

A courteous Iranian received us in a fine old house built round a flagged courtyard. With no language save his own, he ushered us into the office, thickly carpeted with rare rugs, and furnished with a deal table and a couple of chairs. Upon the marble mantelpiece stood a spray of crude and vivid paper flowers, and a clock which had long ago stopped for ever. We sat down. After a few noises intended to convey our grateful thanks, the conversation lapsed into painful silence. There was nothing else to do. We sat and looked at each other.

Then came a welcome bustle outside. In pranced the village schoolmaster, hat on the back of his head, and wearing a jaunty air of assurance with which he fondly hoped to conceal a lack of collar and tie, and the fact that he was not overclean.

"How do you do, my deah frients?" he exclaimed, sweeping off his hat with Persian politeness and replacing it firmly, even farther back.

He had evidently mugged up this phrase from a lesson book a few moments before. These words, beyond his ability to count up to five, were almost his entire stock of English. He ran through his sparse vocabulary at frequent intervals throughout the evening. He and our host were the souls of kindness, and insisted, in spite of our vigorous protests, for we knew some of the less palatable ingredients of Iranian cooking, upon spreading before us *kababs*; a chicken, of which the principal substance appeared to be rubber; milkless tea, syrupy with Russian sugar; and small dishes of spice.

The D.P., a dainty feeder at the best of times, could not stomach the smell of this well-meant spread, so with a flourish he produced our reserve stock of dates, which he opened and proffered to the host. The Iranian smiled,

and nodded to a servant, who, a moment or two later, returned with a dish of dates far more luscious than ours. We understood that they came from our host's own garden.

Eventually our friends made a move to leave us for the night, a manservant in the meantime having spread upon the floor two padded quilts, two hard but clean pillows, and two rugs. We asked to be called at five. Our Deah Frient could count as far as that, and said he understood. At five we should be called. Half an hour later breakfast and some hard-boiled eggs for the road would appear. At six we should start.

Above our head, faint in the uncertain lamplight, a fine example of a moulded ceiling was painted green, deep red, and gold. The quilts made a determined attempt to leave us. We were equal to the occasion, having been in Iran before. We produced from our suitcase a tin of Keatings, which had the desired effect, although, in spite of it, neither of us slept alone that night.

The D.P. announced that he was asleep in no uncertain tones. For ourself, we woke up at frequent intervals to scratch, or when our hip was worsted in an encounter with the stone floor; finally to be awakened by the D.P.'s voice announcing that it was ten to six. We sprang up, washed without soap in a tin basin and about half an inch of water we had both used the night before, and assembled our belongings. Why had we not been called? The reason dawned upon us. Iranian time was not ours, for their zero hour started at sunrise. Five o'clock in the morning to them meant nine, or thereabouts, dependent upon the sun. However, by the time we were ready, eggs and tea arrived, and we set off only half an hour late, without, alas, bidding farewell to our host who had not appeared. The evening before he had, fortunately, indicated a note-book in which to record our thanks, so we penned modest

signatures in the distinguished company of Sir Aurel Stein and other archæologists. They had made Kazerun their headquarters while visiting Shapur—once a capital city, named after the king who mounted his horse by treading upon the neck of the Emperor Valerian.

Off we sped in the car, up mountains and down valleys, until from the top of one high range we looked over five others, each, like the king's daughters, more beautiful than the last. Rumi had told us of a saying that if you were young when you started up the Pass of the Daughter you would be old when you reached the Pass of the Aged Woman. We could well believe him. Frightening was not the word for it.

Bumping with a broken backspring over the mud-rutted roads, one of us was not pleased. Humps and bumps every few yards made us more and more conscious of the broken spring, until Napoleon said he thought he could do something about it, if we stopped. We had been driving for more than three hours upon a cup of tea, and judged the moment propitious to tackle the eggs. They were soft-boiled. One of us was even less pleased. Repairs finished, we travelled for miles over a barren plain, until we topped a rise. The mountain passes seemed more fearsome than ever. Round two of the bends a few charred remains of mudguard and door were significant. Bellicose khans, at convenient distances for travellers, showed coffee-coloured against the strangely thrown strata. Spirals of blue smoke rose from the fires of the charcoal burners. Olive-green hills reared head against a blue sky. Donkeys laden with farm produce followed the uneven white road, one of the train always desperately lame.

"Shiraz," said Horrible, between puffs of a couple of cigarettes. He was adept at lighting two at once in a high wind, one for himself and one for Napoleon.

We drove between high mud walls, and across wide flats where stood modern tin-roofed barracks. Grey-

BY ORDER OF THE SHAH

green cypress trees stretched like a smoke screen across the valley. Behind rose gaunt brown mountains.

Shiraz; of which her son Sa'di said that "even the stranger forgets his home and becomes her willing thrall." After our vicissitudes, she looked a haven indeed, with promise not only of æsthetic delights, but comfort once again, and a bath.

CHAPTER X

POETS IN PARADISE

THEY say that the traveller should approach Shiraz, where "magick was first hatched," from the north. We perforce came from the south, and saw her set in the smoke haze of cypress trees.

The first beggar (the city was noted for beggars) met us at the outskirts. His artificial whine reverberated upon our ears as he squatted by a wall at the roadside, watching a more energetic compatriot, also in rags, turning a hand-mill. Along one side of the road ran a garden, cypresses alternating with russet-red branches rising above the high mud wall. Tin-roofed barracks struck a discordant note in the harmony of scholarly repose framed within the distant brown hills. Some of the barracks were as yet unfinished. Others had housed an Indian cavalry regiment in 1911.

Rounding a bend, we came upon two games of football, each flanked by a large crowd making as much noise as a cup-tie gathering. We drew up at the police post to show our passports. Several officers in smart military uniforms, riding showy grey Arabs, cantered up and down the road, in strong contrast to the down-at-heel appearance of their men. We turned into a broad street cobbled with stones round as a woman's breasts, and shaded by trees bordering the pavement. We stopped upon a corner at the Sadi Hotel, garden gay with flowers, goldfish flashing in the pool. We were ravenous and went straight into the "Dinnin Room." The luncheon menu, translated from

Persian into English for our benefit, included "chicken lover on toast." Hunger appeased, we inspected our room, and rang for someone to give us clean sheets. The servant seemed surprised. Clean sheets were ordered after every twelfth guest. We were only the ninth.

Having had enough motoring for the nonce, we hailed a droshky. Each pony had blue beads, mingled with a few scarlet and white ones, threaded for luck into mane and tail. Although we smiled indulgently at the superstition, we reflected afterwards upon our own belief:

"Something old and something new
Something borrowed, something blue."

Rumi was not due to arrive until the next day, so we enlisted the proffered services of the waiter as guide. A Jew, he had been in India during the War in some military capacity, and spoke excellent English as well as Urdu. We dubbed him Ichabod. He told us that in Shiraz lived many Jews, who claimed to be descended from those carried by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon.

We jolted upon our pilgrimage to Sadi's tomb, set in isolation some way out of the town. His remains were probably removed there from the original resting-place in a city mosque, where stood a big tank always stocked with sacred fish dedicated to Sheikh Sadi, so deep was native reverence for him. We found the tomb near a peaceful village of brown houses, a few of them built of stone picked from the hillside. Here and there bubbled out an underground stream. Vines crept over the brown earth, save on the steepest slopes. Three silky black goats carefully picked their way over the stones. A small boy led two brightly caparisoned ponies, followed by a second urchin with a mule, and another leading a white donkey with a crimson saddle set upon a brightly woven rug edged with fringed tasselling. At a wayside hut a policeman squatted

while the village barber shaved him, or rather scraped at his week-old beard with a blunt cut-throat. A woman carried a goat-skin, hair still adhering in places, to fill it with about ten gallons of icy water from the stream.

The tomb stood within a wall of mud, ornamented with pillars every few feet and guarded directly in front by four fir trees and one tall cypress.

We entered a chamber, groping our way after the brilliant sunlight outside. The tomb, surrounded with a pale blue and gilt fencing upon which hung a picture of the poet, wore an air of dignity.

Sadi, the Nightingale of Persia, born in Shiraz at the end of the twelfth century, was something of a traveller, and intensely human in his outlook on life. He went to Baghdad to study, then voyaged in the Near East. He pilgrimaged to Mecca about fifteen times, and visited India. During the Crusades he was taken prisoner by the French, but was released upon payment of a stiff ransom. In gratitude he married the daughter of his benefactor, a marriage that was not a success. Brooding upon his unhappiness, he observed that a bad wife was really a help to man, because she made life such a hell upon earth that he attained Paradise thereafter: if a man were too happy in this life, he would have to undergo hell in the next.

Sadi was a writer of prose as well as poetry, and was a leader with wide influence. He published two main works, *The Rose Garden*, and *The Orchard*. Every word he used was supposed to have seventy-two meanings. Aged over a hundred, he died where he had lived, in his native town. His mantle descended upon Hafiz.

We once asked Rumi if his country had any laws beside the Quran.

"Laws? No," he replied. "But we have the maxims of Sadi."

We retraced our steps, climbed into the droshky, and

drove off. A blue sky rose above the brown hills. Beneath lay a green and brown vineyard. Cypressess and firs towered above the mud wall of an old cemetery.

"Chellan, the Place of Forty Graves," said Ichabod.

Beside a new tomb a man rocked to and fro, reciting the Quran. Beyond, within a mud wall, trees screened a pretentious blue house belonging to the head of the Qashgai tribe, one of the Shah's permanent "guests" in Teheran. On the summit of a hill stood a tower like an inverted flower-pot. There, when the chieftain was in residence, he kept a permanent look-out. On the crest of another hill three small arches showed the Well of the Women, down which adulterous wives were wont to be thrown to expiate their sins.

Shiraz, rich in the poesy of her famous sons, had many symbolical beliefs and sayings. She was the seat of strong rulers, and, as each was overthrown, her fortunes fell. Thus came the saying that Shiraz water rose in her wells for thirty years, to sink for the next thirty. We had evidently struck a good cycle of years, for streams bubbled everywhere, suddenly emerging from a natural tunnel, kissing the hillside for a few yards, to disappear again. We stopped near a squat tower built astride a stream. Asking permission of a group of loungers draping the door sill, we entered a small dark chamber and groped our way down a sloping tunnel, slippery with fine powder. It was a flour mill. At the bottom, an ingenious system of wheels, one turning another by water-power, ground the wheat and blew white dust into our faces. The only light came down the shaft. Brown-striped sacks bulged with freshly-milled flour. We scrambled up, glad to breathe the fresh air again.

The driver whipped up the horses, and we stopped before a flight of steps leading to a walled garden which wore an air of careful repair. Gravel paths separated petunias, verbena, violas, and carnations. In an ornamental marble pool swam silver fish and golden carp. Butterflies

hovered from gay flowers to scented orange trees. At the farther side ran another wall, steps in the centre leading to a pillared gateway. The courtyard beyond was paved with carved alabaster tombstones of those devotees who wished to be buried near the bones of the immortal Hafiz. Some of them bore names and inscriptions. Others were carved with representations of the incumbent; such as a dignitary in robes, a child mounted upon a horse, a man wrapped in contemplation.

The poet himself lay in the centre of the garden. A square pool, choked with autumn leaves from the plane trees, reflected the tomb, inlaid with gaudy tiles and protected by gimcrack wrought-iron railings in blue and yellow. Round about hung crude electric lights and a picture of the poet. The new Iranian flag waved above.

Two men, who had been conferring with the gardener, approached the tomb, hat in hand, and tiptoed to the headstone. They gently laid a freshly-culled bouquet beside a pot of flowering geraniums. Standing for a moment or two, heads reverently bent, they turned away. One of them, hearing us speak English, volunteered that he had been in England for King George's Jubilee, and waxed informative.

"Shems-ud-din Muhammad," he said, "called Hafiz because he could repeat the Quran by heart, was born in Shiraz at the beginning of the fourteenth century, to be buried there nearly a hundred years later. During his lifetime our beloved city was besieged and captured five times. Living in poverty, which he held essential to genius, he wrote some seven hundred poems. His work shows the sublime and ardent inspiration of a soul impatient of its earthly prison for reunion with that foundation of life from which it originally flowed, and into which it will be finally absorbed."

The Aga Khan had expressed the opinion that Hafiz was

the supreme example of the genius of Moslem Persia; that he was appreciated by the humblest and highest alike.

Hafiz held that his countrymen were fine musicians, for they could play at the same time airs to please clients both sober and drunk.

"He who wishes to know his fortune," volunteered our acquaintance, "invokes Hafiz by the ringlets of his mistress to speak the truth. Shutting his eyes, he opens a book of Hafiz's works. The first stanza at the seventh page is deemed oracular. You English do not appreciate him," he continued. "You prefer Omar Khayyam, who has no melody in his verse."

We left this place of rest and solitude, and drove back over the old humped bridge of Mirza Hamza. The shadow of the droshky leaned across the vineyards towards the soft evening smoke from many fires. Four domes marked the tombs of saints. Many of the city shops had fine old doors set into high archways. The Ark, the Governor's palace, had carved brick towers flanked by ancient cannon, and, over the entrance, a mosaic picture of Rustam and his horse, Baksh.

Ichabod told us a tale of the Ark.

"Pay or leave!" once sternly said a Governor of Shiraz to the man unable to meet his debts.

"But where shall I go?"

"To Tabriz or Kazvin."

"Your Excellency's cousin rules one city; your nephew the other."

"Then appeal to the Shah."

"Your brother," ventured the delinquent, "is his Vizier."

"Oh, go to hell!" exclaimed the unfuried Governor.

"Your Excellency's father has lately died. . . ."

In contrast to the stately palace, beneath the shadow of a gaunt cotton mill, soldiers kicked a football in the

aimless fashion of soldiers off parade the world over. Another group practised the goose-step.

Back in the hotel we asked for the bathroom. They stared at us. Bathroom? They could, perhaps, manage a large bowl in our bedroom.

Soon after dinner, who should turn up but Rumi, who had "earthed" his friend, and managed, after a day and a night of drying wind, to plough through the Mashela and catch us up. We were overjoyed to see him. It had not been the same, trailing around by ourselves without him.

The hotel manager offered us tea served with a special concoction of Shiraz lemon juice in little bottles. Sole occupants of the dining-room, we clustered round the uninviting anthracite stove. Silence fell. Rumi called for his *nargileh* and settled down. We knew the symptoms.

"Shirazi Persian," he began, "was always held to be pure; the only thing in Shiraz that was. Here lived Nimrud and Cyrus. Here strode Alexander. Shiraz once had six gates, fifteen mosques, eleven colleges, and twenty-six baths."

We longed for even one bath, and said so.

"When Shah Attabek's son fell ill, the Mullah said that the father must give to God what he prized most, that the boy might recover. The Shah at once turned his palace into a mosque. The child got better. Those were the days," said Rumi reflectively, as though he had been present, "when Shiraz was Shiraz and Cairo but its suburb."

Silence fell, save for the hubble-bubble of his pipe. Outside, a pack of jackals wailed, voices rising and falling in eerie cadence.

"Shall my voice enlighten your ears with the tale of how the dog came into his own?" asked Rumi.

We settled ourselves more comfortably in our chairs.

"When the world was a good many years younger," he began, "men organized city states, self-contained, and under a king strongly ensconced behind high walls. In the East,

people lived then much as they do now. The women were veiled, and busied themselves in bearing and rearing children, and in discussing neighbours unto the smallest detail. Their husbands were merchants, farmers, go-betweens, what you will. Sheep and cattle wandered unheeded about the twisting narrow lanes. Street vendors crying their wares added to the general hurly-burly.

"There was one difference. Not a single dog was to be seen anywhere in the city. Instead, each household owned a jackal, brushed and scented, which lay by the fireside in winter and upon the threshold in summer, keeping intruders at bay at all times. They were well behaved, these jackals, thoroughly understanding their business and responsibilities as watchmen. They did not quarrel among themselves, nor were there any destitute, wandering aimlessly from café to café, ready to bolt scraps thrown by indulgent coffee drinkers. They did not go abroad at night to howl at the moon, but stayed soberly within doors, beside their masters.

"Outside the city? That was a different matter. Beyond the wall stretched desert everywhere, with other city states here and there. Bitterly cold in winter, blisteringly hot in summer, waterless always, was the desert. There lived, or rather existed, the dogs, who crept into holes in the barren ground at night for shelter from the biting icy winds of winter, and summer's driven sand which cut into their diseased and ill-kept fur. Food was scarce, forcing them to prey even upon their own brethren in times of stress. Herded in packs of forty or fifty, they snapped and snarled by day and roamed beneath the moon by night, howling for they knew not what. Often did they lament their sorry plight, debating how to better their estate. At last a picked council of ministers, cleverer than most, hit upon a plan. They formed a Select Committee which held long and earnest meetings, then sent one of their number to request that a delegation be ap-

pointed from among the city jackals, to discuss a matter of mutual benefit to both.

"The jackals agreed. Next evening at sunset several venerable and, it must be admitted, rather stupid jackals met an equal number of ragged dogs at the main gate of the city.

"The dogs expounded their plan. Many of them had been ill of late. An epidemic had swept some away and had left others thin and weak. The doctors had done their best to cure them, but physic was of no avail without a change of air. That was one side of the case. Now for the other. Always to live within the confines of the city, was that not injurious to the health of the jackals? Such a course tended to make them soft. The atmosphere must be vitiated and stale. Surely they missed never being able to gallop in the fresh cool air of the desert. Would they not like a taste of country life? Cunningly the chief dog spokesman etched a picture of the pleasures and advantages of a pastoral existence. The jackals, brains dulled by generations of hand-feeding, wagged their heads, and gave answer.

" 'We thank you, O dogs,' said the oldest of them. 'It seems an excellent plan you propose. We think it delightful and instructive for our respective communities to exchange places for a while. Let us do so for three days and three nights. We will meet here to-morrow at sundown, that each may sample the life of the other.'

"The delegates parted with mutual expressions of friendship and satisfaction, the tongues of the dogs well in their cheeks.

"At the appointed time both communities assembled in a vast concourse, separated only by the city wall. The leaders advanced, and agreed in three days to meet again at the same place and time, the jackals to return to their comfortable city homes and the dogs to the fresh air of the desert.

"When the heavy gates swung open, the rude onrush of the ill-mannered dogs, eager to taste the comforts of home life, almost bowled over the jackals, who filed out in orderly fashion, looking forward, especially the young bloods, to their country holiday. But like many town-bred people, they did not know what to do when they got there. They stood about in groups, feeling strange and awkward. The sun sank below the horizon. The short twilight deepened. A dismal wind sprang up, whirling sand into their eyes. They huddled together, feeling more forlorn and more at a loss than ever.

"Darkness fell. No good looking for anywhere to sleep at that time of night. Nothing for it save to lie where they stood. If you have slept indoors in a comfortable padded basket all your life, you cannot expect a dreamless sleep your first night in the open. But the next day's sun soon loosed stiffened limbs. Indeed, for an hour or two they found it pleasant to gambol, and made trials of speed one against the other. Then arose the question of food. There was no one to bring platters of cooked meat and biscuit soaked in rich gravy. Nor was there any food to bring. One or two of the most agile managed to catch rabbits, but for the most part they went hungry. Each day seemed longer than the last. Each night longer than that. Finally, at sunset on the third day, they gathered thankfully at the city gates, more than eager to return to a soft life once again.

"Meanwhile, what of the dogs? After their helter-skelter entrance into the city, each found himself a home, and settled down for the night.

"'What comfort! What luxury!' they murmured, as they sank into soft baskets and fell into a deep refreshing sleep. Next morning, when the townsfolk went about their business, naturally they noticed the change. They did not mind. The dogs offered no explanation of their presence, which did not matter to their masters one way

or the other, as long as their behaviour was all it should be. The dogs awoke early, kept themselves scrupulously clean, walked carefully, talked softly, and were punctual for meals, which they neither gobbled nor splashed on to the floor. There was not one angry word, much less a quarrel. By sundown every dog was in his appointed place, fawning upon his new owner, and professing himself ready for bed.

"On the morning of the third day, the dog leaders held a conference in the market square, at which each delegate seemed in complete accord with the others. Word was passed round to every dog in the city, who thus knew what to do when the time came.

"At sunset that evening, instead of keeping tryst, each went to his own house, where he was securely tucked into bed by his master. The poor jackals outside the gates kicked their heels for some time, eager to return to their comfortable homes, having had more than enough of the wide open spaces. A quarter of an hour, half an hour passed. No sign of the dogs. Twilight was lost in darkness. Had they mistaken the date? The young ones grew impatient, and grumbled at the faulty arrangements of their elders. The moon rose. Anxious jackals, peering between the bars of the city gates, saw the streets silent and deserted. They could bear it no longer. Lifting their voices in unison, they called to the dogs to let them in. Instantly, like a ragged *feu-de-joie*, came back the answer:

"'No! No! No! You have enjoyed the comforts of town life all these years. Now it is our turn. Go away! We wish to sleep. So do our masters.'

"With a self-satisfied air, the dogs settled themselves more comfortably than ever in their baskets. The jackals, realizing how completely they had been duped, threw back their heads and howled in despair. The more they howled, the more their late owners were glad the noise was outside,

and the more the gruff 'No! No! No!' of the dogs was applauded as the action of a good house guardian. Wail upon wail of despair sounded from the desert. The dogs listened in silence for some time, before tucking their heads into the cushions that they might hear no more.

"And that is why, every night, jackals wail on the outskirts of eastern cities, begging to be let in, and dogs bark roughly, 'No! No! No, no, no!'"

The murmur of Rumi's hubble-bubble proclaimed the end of the tale. The D.P. was all but asleep.

Ichabod came in to say that Napoleon was waiting for orders for the morrow.

"We will start at five-thirty," we told him firmly, meaning six, of course.

At a quarter-past six next morning, pitch dark, we roused the hotel staff ourself, and began a hasty toilet. Sketchily clad, our face deep in the basin, the electric light chose to go out. . . . We swallowed a hasty breakfast and went outside with the D.P. There was no car. We had a long drive to Isfahan in front of us. Stamping up and down the broad main street, we invoked the Deity in the several languages at our command, until Napoleon drove up, nearly two hours late. He neither had nor offered excuse. We were in Iran.

"So pure is the air of Shiraz," murmured Rumi, "that the dew would not rust a steel scimitar exposed even through the night."

It was perhaps as well for Napoleon that no scimitar was at hand. We stepped into the car, and climbed the broad road to the Tang-i-Allah-i-Akbar, the Gate-of-God-is-Most-Great. The gate over the pass was long and broad, unimpressive from within, perched on the side of a steep hill overlooking a deep ravine, wherein ran the narrow Rukabad River immortalized by Hafiz.

Shirazis had the habit of walking through the gate, and thus beneath the shadow of the holy Quran, at Nu

Roz and at each new moon, save only that of Moharram. Clambering on top of the gate, we peered through a thick lattice into a small domed chamber, blue tiled, guarding a massive Quran written by Hassan, and publicly displayed every Friday, shrouded for the rest of the week in a wooden box lightly inscribed with a red-painted geometrical pattern. In one corner stood a shabby Quran stand holding a couple of old newspapers. Dust lay thickly over everything.

"He that seeks to steal but one page of this Quran," said Rumi severely, eyeing us as we poked an idle finger through the lattice, "will find himself bowed down with more than he bargained for. That one page will become as weighty as all the maxims of the Prophet of God which you see here in this great volume. None could carry it for any length of time."

Small dome-shaped buildings clinging to the hillside seemed to be wedged there by tall trees. Rumi said they housed a dervish or two. From our point of vantage we contemplated the city we had just left.

"Let deception wait upon simulation," murmured the D.P., imitating Rumi, as he used a right-angle view-finder to photograph a group of women.

The background was a line of dark blue-purple hills paling to rosy pink. In the distance stood the dead gardens and fountains of an old palace, now a military barracks. Nearby, the ruins of the Castle of the White Giant commemorated Rustam's conquest over the Speed Devil.

Looking through the Quran Gate we understood the delight of the caravans of old when they first glimpsed the fertile plain of Shiraz after a monotonous and bleak journey from distant Isfahan.

There was some slight hitch about our passports. The policeman had forgotten his pencil or his rubber stamp or something, and refused to allow us to proceed. Not only

that, it was the Muslim Sunday, our Friday, the Prince of Days. There was nothing for it but to wait. We sat by the roadside to watch the peasants trudging into the town with market produce.

"Your Excellence may think our people are simple folk," said Rumi, in the voice of one who has a story in his mind and means to tell it, "but they have the cupidity of discretion, as I will recount to you, if you will allow my memory its shortcomings.

"An old man was once seated outside his dwelling-place not far from this very gate, wrangling amicably with his son over the crops. The father refused to forsake what he had always sown in that particular field. His son, the wick of impetuosity fed by the oil of youth, was anxious to try rotation. When the argument grew heated, the son gave his father a gentle push. He over-balanced off his three-legged stool and, old bones being brittle, he broke an arm. Instantly the son was full of the contrition of solicitude, and came out with a brilliant suggestion. The damage was done, no doubt about that, but why not turn it to account?

"'Let us go to the police,' he said, his conversation sensible, his smiles well timed. 'Let us tell them that there has been a quarrel over the crops. It is true. But instead of accusing me, make a scapegoat of your indescribable brother's most unlikeable son. We can find plenty of witnesses to prove both his presence and his guilt. It is easy. Not only that, if we report the accident at once, you will have a good and a free doctor for your arm. Further, by the Beard of the Prophet, I shall get my own back on my hideous cousin, for whom, as you know, I have less than a little regard. Let us loose the floodgates of imagination that we may stand on the tiptoes of righteousness and in the bower of bounty.'

"The old man agreed. They went to the police station

together and lodged a complaint. A constable was deputed to take them to the government hospital.

"When the case came up for trial, witness after witness stepped into the box and gave evidence to support the story. The nephew in the dock said nothing. He just stood with a vacant grin upon his face. In most cases, the accused has a dozen watertight alibis and produces a stream of evidence to prove his innocence. This one did not even trouble to engage a pleader. When the prosecution had made things look exceedingly black, he told his story.

"It so happened that on the day that he was supposed to have broken his uncle's arm, at an early hour he had set out for Shiraz. He reached the Gate-of-God-is-Most-Great, and felt a burning pain in his side. He sat down. The pain grew worse. He called the policeman on duty, who carried him into the guard-room. A doctor took him into hospital. Thus he had a perfect alibi, vouched for by official witnesses, all strangers to him. Not only was the prosecution confounded, but a whole train of professional witnesses stood condemned for perjury.

"The problem of father and son was not so much to win the case as to extricate themselves. The ever-resourceful son came to the rescue. He whispered for a few moments in his father's ear. The old man's face gradually broadened into a beam.

" 'Now I remember,' he said. 'I fell over a boulder, broke my arm, and fainted with the pain. Of course. I must have dreamed my nephew's part in the affair.'

"The spark of imagination served to light the fire of destiny. The son became one of our country's most eminent lawyers."

Some more beggars pestered us as we made to drive on.

"They are loud when they beg," said Rumi. "It is good, for when they are silent they steal. Is it not written in the Quran that prayer carries us half-way to God, fasting

brings us to the door of His Palace, but the giving of alms procures admission?"

Suiting action to pious hope, Rumi tossed on to the road a few insignificant coins. The beggars transferred their attention to the D.P. who, determined to have a front seat in Paradise, nearly caused a riot by handing a small note to the most persistent and voluble among them, who poured a stream of conventional blessings upon our heads. Rumi, who had heard them many times before, translated them for our benefit.

"The beautiful image of excellent bounty shall remain fixed on the mirror of duration and perpetuity," the beggar had said. "While time endures, and while the world exists, the extent of this exalted gift shall remain an admired picture in the mirror of memory. Submission to the fair image of this conspicuous generosity shall be everlasting."

Just as well for the beggar that words and protestations cost him nothing!

CHAPTER XI

THY GLORY SHALL PERSIST

THE beauty of Shiraz, like the merit of a homely woman, had grown upon us. We were sorry to go.

When we left the Gate-of-God-is-Most-Great, the pass broadened into the Herodasht plain; about thirty miles across, hills rising sharply all round like an earthenware saucer. In the opening dawn the peasants were unmercifully beating their donkeys to market. Policemen, waving rifles, symbols of western justice, tore past us in a grey car, nearly upsetting a tandem-drawn farm cart, bells around the horse collars jingling musically in time to the measured clop-clop of the hoofs.

The sound of the bells made the D.P. remark that he was about to celebrate his silver wedding.

"What is that?" enquired Rumi.

Before we had got far with our explanation, he interrupted us.

"Ah! I understand," he said, a smile broadening over his face. "Sir P has lived with Lady P for twenty-five years, and is now going to marry her. Fortunate is the father of such a son!"

We sped through miles of undulating nothing, save for clumps of feathery pink gypsophila here and there, gently stirring in the breeze. No wonder, in these peaceful surroundings, that a lazy poesy and charm have striven against practical thought and deed.

Rumi must have guessed our musings.

"Iran," he began, "has ever been the couch of classic romance, spreading thence east and west, far and near. Her gods founded a rare mythology. Horror, vicious mate of fair Fantasy, while he was busy creating carnage abroad, sometimes left her to spread happy as well as woeful fables westwards from Asia to Assyria and Egypt, and later to Greece and Rome, on a journey lasting unto our own time. Gods and goddesses were extolled by their hardy sons wheresoever they went, thereafter to suckle the whimsicality woven by poets throughout the ages to inspire and enlighten us. Perhaps the Olympian heights were the Elburz mountains. Ancient Persians, who left their hills to subjugate the people living upon the plains about the Tigris, worshipped gods who inspired Zeus, Heracles, Apollo, Aphrodite, and Adonis.

"The romance of Adonis and Aphrodite suggests another, of the time when Shamash, the Sun God, controlled the known world. New in age, old as time in theme, we have harmonized the tale of Gypsœ, the Goddess of Fragrance, and Quis, the God of Desire, amid surroundings familiar to us.

"Gypsœ, of the right shape in the right place at the right time, came as a legacy to the world, that mankind might want. Quis, favoured among the gods, had lived for long upon Olympus, amid youth and beauty, at their request, at his command. Hot from the love of a beautiful Persian Princess in the King's own pleausance, Quis came upon Gypsœ, her form waving sensefully among the young trees. Beholden, he beheld. Was she not a goddess of known appeal? Was not he the God of Desire?

"After an impassioned meeting they flew to Olympus, where the beautiful Gypsœ took fright at her lofty state. Quis tried to hold her, but he stumbled clumsily. They fell. Again and again they fell. Every time he tried to recover, their plight grew worse. At first quickly, then

more slowly, they tumbled down the hill until they neared the bottom of a dark valley. Below lay rocks, over which flowed the Stream of Life. There were but two more steps they could possibly take, one to the rocks, and the other to fall or dive into the water. Quis sensed beauty all about, despite their hurried and unhappy descent. Were they not in a sheltered valley? A light shone whence they had lately fallen. The tortuous upward path was near at hand, but the journey looked long and they were neither of them much in mood for a second attempt. Nevertheless, he decided to try again, realizing by then why it had all happened. Before, when Gypsœ showed her alarm by fleeing from him, he had run after her, clutching frantically at her retreating form. But now he knew what to do, could they but reach the top again. When, for safety's sake, she started to flee down the hill, he would stand firm, waiting for her return.

"Idle dreams. Gypsœ, thinly veiled, denied him. Quis grew angry. The honour of the gods was at stake. Was this where he was commanded to the water? With a hesitant glance over his shoulder, he first asked advice of the gods. Was it *go*, when a dive into the stream below, and obedience to an obvious request from an attendant nymph would bring him to his senses? Or was it *stay*?"

"There was only one answer worthy of the gods. They made a single word. The word they made was *quis*. Whether they wished to draw their favoured friend to their council, or whether they charged the word with esoteric meaning, was not for mortals to decide. Sufficient that their chorus created the clouds, sending them scudding far and wide over the world, carrying the word we know so well.

"Thereafter the gods held their peace.

"In due time the breeze bore back the clouds with answers; some quiet and soft, recalling gentle memories;

some noisy amid the laughter of school and home; and some clarion clear, with the confidence of years behind them. They all made the same answer. That too was one word. The word was *ego*.

"Quis heard the messages as they rustled among the gentle spring leaves. But what was Gypsœ's answer? That was why he had consulted the gods in the first place; although they had decided, with the wisdom which is theirs, to leave it to the fair goddess herself.

"'We cannot do better,' they argued, 'than put the problem clearly and simply to her in one word, which has only one word for answer.'

"Gypsœ too heard the call. There was but one thing for her to do, particularly as Quis had said the water below looked as cold as the top of the Mount of Orontes. Not much fun for anyone that. Besides. . . . She came through a clearing in the young trees straight to him. She did not speak. It was the answer he wanted. From that moment they started once more up the slopes of Olympus.

"That is the reason why mortals cannot say the word *quis*, God of Desire, without expecting the answer *ego*. Nor can they think of flowers except as they are typified by Gypsœ, Goddess of Fragrance; who was, you will remember, of the right shape, in the right place, at the right time.

"She lives still, high in our mountains. Indeed, you see her here, as gypsophila."

Rumi ceased. We glanced around and saw bushes of delicate pink flowers stretching to the distant snow.

Persopolis lay across the marshy plain. What was that building in the right distance? We drew near. It proved anything but a ruin; an aggressively modern sugar factory nestling beneath the hills. Set several hundred yards from the road, and built with long horizontal strips of plate glass, it vaguely reminded us of the coach station at Victoria. In strong contrast, a string of heavily laden camels wound

through the entrance. So engaged were we with the factory, that when next we looked ahead the slender columns of Persepolis were silhouetted against the dark hillside.

We drew up beneath the foot of a plateau overlooking the amber plain we had just crossed, and divested ourselves of some of our many coats.

"Let us ask permission to rub our foreheads at the Gate of Almighty Splendour," said Rumi, as he approached the police guard. "Set the remembrance of the things which I will tell you like pearls in the lobe of your ear."

He warmed to his task. Darius the Great began to build Persepolis about 519 B.C. His son Xerxes finished it about thirty years later; although some say Jamshid, who owned a mirror in which he professed to see the whole world at a glance, conceived the idea, hence the name Takht-i-Jamshid, the Throne of Jamshid. Persepolis, "Hewn out of Rock," probably derived her name from Fars, the province of which she was once the hub. The connection seemed negligible until we realized that Fars or Pars came perhaps from Pherez, "to divide," because Cyrus divided Babylonia between the Persians and the Medes. Cambyzes brought from fallen Egypt and from Thebes over six thousand workmen and many treasures, whereupon the fame of Persepolis went forth.

Temporary hoarding concealed the solid rock which formed the base of the platform, and gave us the impression of a vast stage, with no wings, viewed from the orchestra pit; backdrop, a rocky hill scene.

A few years ago Professor Hertzfelt, at the corners of the main platform, found, in the original stone boxes, four foundation plaques, two of gold and two of silver, depicting the start of Persepolis by Darius, although most of the finds have been architectural. Only stone remained; no wood, no sun-dried brick.

Above the natural rock, massive blocks of stone formed two wide staircases rising to a paved courtyard, once bordered by high walls, which tumbled long ago to the plain over which Darius and Alexander must often have gazed. Ponderous gates guarded the entrance. Only pivot holes remained to show us where they swung slowly open to admit one conqueror after another; and oblong shafts wherein were shot strong bolts at the first hint of an onslaught against the denizens.

"It takes you English a thousand years to make a college lawn," said Rumi. "But it took two thousand to make Persepolis the wonder that it is to-day. Did not your Curzon Lord say that 'no more sumptuous framework of royal magnificence was ever wrought by man'?"

Two carved winged statues, not unlike the famous "oiled and curled Assyrian Bulls," guarded the entrance. We had not connected Persepolis with the same type of art, and almost identical forms of sculpture, as that of Nineveh and Khorsabad. The feet, as high as vandals could reach, were despoiled, as were the faces, at which stones had been thrown. Much harm was done by Islamic fanatics during the Arab invasion in the seventh century, for their religion did not permit of graven images. More were demolished by local rulers in the middle ages, to avoid the expense of entertaining powerful and whimsical kings who came to see the ruins.

Over plinths and lower limbs, people who should have known better had scribbled signatures in Roman and Arabic characters. In 1800, Captain James Malcolm scratched his name. Nine years later, Morier followed suit. The name of Sir R. Willock was well and deeply carved, and six years later, in 1830, that of Claudius Rich. There also we saw the record 1870, Stanley, *New York Herald*, and the name of Lord Curzon. Insignificant people followed the sorry lead of those early travellers.

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Elsewhere upon the ruins the following lines were inscribed by an unknown hand:

“The Palace that to Heav’n his pillars threw,
And Kings the forehead on his threshold drew—
I saw the solitary Ringdove there,
And ‘Coo, coo, coo,’ she cried, and ‘coo, coo, coo.’”

“‘Coo’ means where,” said Rumi. “These great carvings have suffered a fate sharper than the wit of Plato; more murderous than the eyebrow of a young damsel.”

We wandered awe-struck among gaunt stones pregnant with age. Doorways reminiscent of Buddhist temple ruins in Ceylon stared bleakly into the sky; all that was left of the Palace of Darius. We climbed thirty-one shallow broad steps to the Royal Hall of Audience. At the side of each step an ancient Persian, clad in draped robes, carried a lance, and, upon his back, a long case like an arrow quiver. Beyond the staircases, and upon the sides of the high plinth, figures in bas-relief were similar to those others, save that each was shown with a lock of hair behind the ear.

“They wore this lock,” said Rumi, “the more easily to be borne to Heaven when they died, or so that when they were beheaded, the hangman would not defile their severed heads by picking them up by the lips. Heads were shaved, except for this tuft behind each ear, twisted into curls. The practice is long since dead, except among orthodox Jews.”

The central motifs were of a lion, claws buried deep in the quarters of a rearing bull, which raised one foot and pawed the air in agony, and of a man fighting a lion. Only one female form was discovered in all the wealth of Persepolis; a lioness.

The huge stone pillars were probably connected by wooden beams. High up, the remains of carvings still showed. We turned again to the entrance, and stood

admiring the grace of the sculptured figures upon the steps, whence Darius must so often have gazed upon his palace of scented cedar wood. The wood was probably brought from the Lebanon or from Kashmir, and the limestone quarried locally, polished to look like marble. The palace was obviously destroyed by a great fire only a few years after it was built, possibly Alexander's revenge for the burning of the temple at Ephesus by the Persians on the day of his birth, or to indulge the whim of Thäis, one of the lovely Greek women who accompanied him on his march.

"He probably felt pangs of regret," observed Rumi sagely, "when he saw the blaze; but what shall be said of a man who will make a promise at dawn and break it at nightfall?"

Not only did Alexander destroy the Cedar Palace, but also the royal library, said to contain books written by Zoroaster himself, probably seven hundred years before the Christian era. Yet possibly they escaped, for somewhere in this part of Iran lies buried treasure beyond man's wildest dreams—more than enough to rehabilitate the fortunes of the entire country—gold and silver, diamonds, emeralds, pearls, rubies, and other precious stones without limit. Darius hid his wealth before sallying forth against the mighty Alexander.

We passed upon our way to what was once the harem, turned into the living quarters of the archæological expedition of the Oriental Institute of Chicago University. Curious contrast: scholars living in a harem, probing into age-old mysteries, yet owning their own aeroplane. They reconstructed one of the chambers as they surmised it originally to have been, except that they substituted wooden pillars for the missing stone ones. We entered by a sculptured stone doorway, narrow in comparison with its height, and with the vast conception of the main halls. Carved upon the sides of the doorway, two robed

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attendants followed a royal figure. One held over his master's head a curious object looking like a fly-whisk, the whole in hard grey stone.

We emerged. Cut into the hill behind we saw two ancient tombs, ornamented with sculpture.

"Will you please to get your luggages into the car, Sir P?" said Rumi, waiting patiently for us. We reluctantly turned our backs upon all that remained of the ancient splendour.

CHAPTER XII

FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

WE reluctantly descended the famous steps of Persepolis and climbed into the car. A minute or two later we turned to have a last look at the tall columns of the Hall of Audience, but they were hidden by a protruding mound.

The road from Persepolis to Susa was surely haunted with the tread of Alexander's legions and with those who fell by the wayside, dead from thirst; overcome by privations which even a great leader could not avoid.

We neared the base of a circular range of hills, where a rushing stream, keeping pace side by side with the road, led us to Sivand. Above towered a bare and austere hill, claimed as the resting-place of Noah's Ark.

"In a crevice upon that height," said Rumi, "lies the body of a sage, perfect in every respect, save that part of his beard and one tooth are missing. He died hundreds of years ago, but so holy was he that the gods in their wisdom have preserved him in ice. There was once a hole in these mountains. If you could pass through it, that was proof that your parents were properly married. A man whose stomach was as wide as the voluptuousness of his own conception once got through, although a thin man failed, ever after to be called *haram zadeh*, or begotten unfortunately. When his mother opened the avenue of indiscretion, she forgot to close the door of prudence."

We had distinct recollection of a friend of the family who once said to us in our youth: "If I were your father, which, for all you know, I may be. . . ."

Small boys were playing tip-cat, overshadowed by huge, tilted rock strata. Sapling poplars bordered neat gardens. We passed a mounted police patrol.

"I have heard of only one Englishman who visited our estimable country, and who was a bad horseman," Rumi volunteered. "His unavailing manifestations on the back of one of our shapely stallions amazed my countrymen, who thought that every Englishman was born astride a horse. His servant saved his face, afterwards saying to him:

"Do not be ashamed, Excellence. They do not think that you are an indescribable rider. I have told them that you, like all Englishmen, are ferocious on a horse's back, but that the head of your Excellence's prudence is not always guided by the line of moderation. I told them that you were drunk.'"

We bounced along the rough road, longing for the days of the Spanish envoy, Knight Ruy de Gozales Clavija, who said that "the road was very level and there was not a stone to be found on it." We stopped for a drink. A lorry drew up beside us. The driver, to our surprise, proved to be an Englishman, a Cockney to boot. We stood him a bottle of cold beer, for we took care to carry ice for the drinks, whatever suffered. He told us something of his story. During the war he was with Dunsterforce. Afterwards, he found himself without prospect of employment at home, and with a passable knowledge of Persian. One of the many princes advertised for a chauffeur. The Cockney accepted the job. His princeling was in the habit of going away for week-end carousals, accompanied by lady friends. "And they didn't forget to send one down for the chauffeur, neither," said the Cockney, smacking his lips. He volunteered that this was his last job. According to him, the country was not what it had been in the "plenty twenties," what with one thing and another, so he was returning to England for good. Rumi listened with interest to his tale. We suspected that he knew

more than he cared to repeat about those parties. The truth lay hidden behind a face which bespoke Mongolian interference in Iranian ancestry, when Persian youths not only played at love, but learned to draw a bow, handle a sabre, ride a horse, wrestle, fence, walk the tight-rope, vault, juggle, and gamble with cards. Young aristocrats were taught above all to speak the truth, upon which we gave Rumi his head.

"Falsehood mixed with good intentions is preferable to truth tending to excite strife. Suppose the headman of a village is able to protect the lives or property of his people by a falsehood, is he not justified, or bound, to have recourse to it? But although we tell lies ourselves, we do not like others to do so."

Charles Lamb's maxim that truth is precious and not to be wasted on everybody, obviously applied to their outlook. Truth, however, did pay sometimes, illustrated by a story which Rumi told us.

"Once upon a time," said he unoriginally, "a Shah of Shahs grew weary of the intrigues of his courtiers, and decided to appoint in their places lowly men of proven loyalty. Among others he chose to elevate a worthy milkman to be the captain of his guard. This individual discharged his new duties so truly and well that the Omnipotence of Splendour professed himself well pleased. He remarked, however, that wherever the new captain went he was accompanied by an elaborately trapped mule bearing a heavy trunk.

"‘This man is going the way of the others,’ sighed the Shah. ‘He is growing too rich. Doubtless he carries his wealth upon the back of that mule. I must be wary, or he will become too powerful, and will try to depose me.’"

"He therefore demanded that the mule trunk be rendered unto him. As he expected, his captain threw himself at his feet and begged that he might be allowed to keep the contents. The Lord of Revolutions was adamant. Still

the captain begged for mercy. He said that his whole wealth was contained in that trunk.

"‘Without it,’ he pleaded, ‘I can do nothing.’"

"Relentlessly, and with more than a little curiosity, the Shah ordered the precious box to be broken open. It contained nothing of greater value than common milk pails and old cloths! The Shah expressed surprise, and asked the captain why he hoarded such things, relics of an existence before royal favour had elevated him.

"‘Sire,’ said the confused captain, ‘far be it from your humble sacrifice to displease Your Majesty, but I will speak the truth, as always. The favours of a prince are oft-times lost for small faults. I deemed it wise to keep these few poor things against the day when perchance I too might lose your confidence. Were I to be degraded from my present post, I and my family would at least not starve.’"

We passed the remains of an ancient and decrepit stone bridge, where irises, those Eyes of Heaven, bordered the River of Birds, nigh unto the Fountain of Birds, water from whose depths the locust-bird would follow anywhere in the world. Beneath the rose-bushes the bul-bul sang his enchanting song.

"It is only necessary to tickle our land and it will laugh into blossom," Rumi remarked.

Peasants guided primitive wooden ploughs, to which were yoked a couple of oxen, among low scrub and between trees with red, grey, and green twigs. We wanted to see the tombs and sculptures of Makshi Rustam, where we heard tell of columns, a marble throne, and equestrian statues, of which one horse had a Greek inscription carved upon the chest. Moreover, we wished to see the ancient fire temple of white marble. Here legend had it that Darius lay buried deep in the rock, beneath an inscription "I am a Persian, the son of a Persian, an Aryan and of Aryan blood." We also wanted to visit the haunts of the

Potent Prince Rustam, who was forty cubits high, and died at the age of eleven hundred and thirteen!

We crossed a plain covered with wild liquorice, anticipating emblems of a faded glory, until Rumi shook us from our day-dreams.

"I have mislaid the road," he said blandly.

With more than three hundred miles to motor that day, we were unable to retrace our steps, and had no recourse but to drive on. We sped through villages and fields, and past desolate khans, their square mud walls turreted at the corners, the huts within rudely thatched with straw secured with more mud.

"This way," said Rumi reflectively, "now deserted and peaceful, echoes to the tread of centuries, for the great Persepolis and Susa lay on the annual high road of the Kings of Kings. Always trod they this plain, yea, even in the days of Esther, when letters were sent by riders on horseback, mules, camels, and young dromedaries. Alas, the pilgrim road has now gone dull from the lack of the feet of captives to polish it."

Dull? We did not contradict him, but round a bend lurched a bright blue motor char-à-banc. We almost expected the label to say Ditchling, Plumpton, Lewes; but it was inscribed in Persian, and filled with workmen. Before the smothering dust had cleared away we nearly ran into a flock of fat-tailed sheep, plump and well-liking, moving slowly towards hills which assumed a spurious velvety quality in the winter sunlight. Upon the lower slopes labourers ploughed within a few yards of each other. The land was scrubby with small bushes. Here and there men dug, two to each spade, one wielding the long handle and the other pulling the loaded blade towards him with a chain.

Across the plateau came the faint sound of camel bells, ceaselessly jingling their time-worn history.

We came to Sa'adatabad, a big village shaded by fine old trees, autumn leaves cluttering our way as in an English

country lane. Beyond, rock thrust forward like an ancient fortress. The valley narrowed. A thin line of snow outlined the further mountains. Donkey caravans carried farm produce to market, urged by peasants wearing pork-pie hats. Ever and anon a small police post lay by the roadside, behind a pair of stout whitewashed pillars, connecting neither gate nor fence, one of them containing an insecure letter-box.

For hours on end we traversed the sparse plain, bumping over the indifferent road.

"Let Sir P thank his Heaven that Isfahan is not still ten days' journey from Shiraz, astride a hardy Shirazi mule," remarked Rumi, as we groaned after a specially bad bump. "Even a hundred years ago there were only tracks between Teheran and the provinces. Mounted messengers jogged along at five miles an hour, covering the seven hundred odd miles between Bushire and Teheran in the remarkable time of about ten days."

We came to Dehbid, with the lofty ruins of the Castle of Bahram. Dehbid is the second windiest village in Iran, and the highest inhabited spot.

"*Deh* means a village," explained Rumi, "and *bid* means 'there was.'"

The Village That Was. We could believe it. There was nothing, save a few mud hovels and the inevitable group of tea-house benches, a small police post, a couple of shops, two or three small boys, and the usual deaf mute of whom one always asks the way. Yet Dehbid on the map was written as large as Manchester.

"I have a recent tale to tell to you of this place," said Rumi; "of a tragedy which set its seal upon the neighbourhood. Since the events of this story, all trade has left the the Village That Was. You see the ruins of the castle?" pointing to the hill above us. "There lived, not many years since, one Ferid-ud-Din, a wealthy and unscrupulous merchant.

"One day he sprawled in his palanquin in the wealth of silence. He belly wobbled with the rhythm of the bearers. One arm hung over the side, idly flicking the back of a slave who, by the eyes of Ali, was not trotting fast enough to please his master. They journeyed beyond the mosque; past the house of the oil company's representative, tennis courts deserted during the morning heat save for two boys dragging a roller; and beyond the bazaar dealers who cater for foreigners by having larger, slightly cleaner shops and much larger prices.

"Following a sharp turn to the right, Ferid-ud-Din left the main street, and, with a grunt, bade his bearers set him down near the fruit market. At the entrance lay a beggar, whose name was Ismail. Thin and emaciated, every bone in his body almost breaking through the wrinkled skin, he lay stretched upon a few filthy rags. Rotting bandages failed to conceal festering sores. A palsied hand held out an earthen saucer to catch a coin from the compassionate passer-by.

"For a moment or two Ferid-ud-Din regarded him in silence. Gradually the benevolent expression, assumed for the benefit of his European acquaintances, faded, leaving a bloated, pock-marked face, chins cascading beneath the heavy jowl. Sunk between the fleshy cheeks a thin-lipped mouth curved downwards in a sneer. On each side of a small pinched nose glinted avaricious eyes.

"*'Salaam 'aleikum, Excellence,'* he said ironically to the prostrate beggar.

"Ismail sprinkled his head with metaphorical dust from beneath the feet of his patron, and shielded his eyes from his visitor's brilliant radiance.

"*'Wa 'aleikum as-salaam, Presence,'* he replied. 'Alas, what shall I say? My unworthy body cannot gain the nourishment it needs. Therefore these sores heal not. My wife, as thou knowest, has forsaken me (may the palms of her hands be spewed out by dogs). There is none to

care for me. Strength I have not with which to work, and scarcely two *chaies* are given to me daily, that I starve not.'

" 'Humph!' murmured Ferid-ud-Din, his eyes sinking yet further behind the heavy lids. 'What about thy debt owed to me? A hundred good tomans, at interest of a bare thirty per cent. a month did I advance to thee for thy daughter's wedding. Thou didst swear to repay me before three months had passed. That was a year ago. Even now I have not received my money.'

"Ismail shrank back in his rags. His voice grew shrill.

" 'Presence,' he whined pitifully. 'By the Beard of the Prophet, I swear. . . .'

" 'Peace, dog!' snapped Ferid-ud-Din. 'Take note of that which I said to thee but eight days gone. If thou payest me not, before thy carcass is thrown to the dogs I will seize thy miserable remains to do with as I will.'

"At these words the beggar's frail body seemed infused with a new strength. Slowly, painfully, he raised himself to his knees, staggered to his feet, and stood swaying above the fat unwholesome figure in the palanquin. The crowd surged into the market, cooks and housewives bargaining in shrill tones with strident shopkeepers. Small boys, carrying large shallow baskets, plagued all and sundry.

"Ismail spoke, but instead of the usual thin tones, his voice boomed like the notes of a deep bell.

" 'By the sacred name of Allah,' he began. 'I. . . .'

"His deep-set eyes flashed. His hands clawed like a madman's. As he spoke, the hurrying crowds ceased moving, as though silenced by an unseen force.

" 'Hear, O ye who pass by,' he cried. 'If the pot-bellied pig before me dares to defile my dead body by touching even so much as a single hair of my head, him will I curse. My soul shall follow and plague him until he dies. This do I swear by the House of Ali, son-in-law

of the Prophet, by the Dargah of Hazrat Abbas, and by the Beard of the Prophet himself.'

"The fanatical voice ended in a shriek as Ismail fell to the ground, his limbs twitching, and a faint grey liquid bubbling between blue lips. In a few seconds he ceased to move, his small remaining store of strength exhausted by the dramatic utterance. His withered body lay still.

"For an instant Ferid-ud-Din remained motionless. His eyes dilated with fear, showing that the dead man's threat had found a mark. Then a western veneer took charge again. He raised himself, and poked contemptuously with a cane at the man huddled at his feet.

"'Carry that crow's carcass to my house,' he commanded.

"One last dig at the still warm body, and, in a sudden gesture of defiance, he made a loud noise in his throat, and spat upon the dead face. With a coarse laugh, he continued on his way, and was soon immersed in discussing the intricacies of yet another unscrupulous deal.

"That evening he arrayed himself in the starched splendour of his evening dress, the black and white austerity relieved by magnificent pearl studs, and a diamond ear-ring clipped to his left ear, after what he had been assured was the latest fashion. Once more he was carried past the mosque and the oil bungalow, but this time he turned uphill to the European Club, where he received his guests. Dinner over, the party descended the hill to the cinema. After the news reel came a film-study of the clinging tenacity of fresh-water weeds. Ferid-ud-Din's blood ran cold, for he hated water with all the distaste of a cat. Then an ardent young man sang a love song to a girl posed in a moonlit garden. Words and music were flashed on to the screen, while the moon danced upon the notes, indicating time and length. The last refrain died away, leaving the screen blank. Something

was clearly disturbing Ferid-ud-Din. He nervously gripped the arms of his chair and glanced at his guests, who were talking and laughing as they waited for the big picture. They had noticed nothing strange. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Yet without doubt it was there, coming nearer, and directly towards him.

"The moon dancing about the screen had not disappeared with the rest of the picture, but had remained, gradually changing from yellow, through red, to rusty black. Steadily it came nearer. Ferid-ud-Din saw two spots of fire which had not dulled with the rest, but glowed like reproachful eyes. They burned into his brain. With them came a rushing, roaring sound. His ear-drums felt they would burst.

"Nearer and nearer. . . .

"He could stand it no longer. With a muttered apology, he hurried out of the darkened cinema and through the crowd of bearers gambling by the dim light of horn lanterns. He looked behind him. The ball of fire had faded into the surrounding blackness. In its place was the head of Ismail, two piercing eyes fixed with a penetrating gaze and floating towards him. Horror-stricken, Ferid-ud-Din tried to shield his eyes with his hand, but nothing could blot out that accusing stare. He backed away, not daring to turn.

"'Ayee! I come! I come!' he shrieked, his voice echoing over the lake lapping only a few yards from him.

"He hurried on, tripping and stumbling in frantic effort. Where the road made a gradual ascent he saw a stocky hill pony. Seizing the reins from the astonished groom, he threw himself into the saddle and urged the horse into a wild gallop up the hill. From time to time he felt compelled to look behind him. The eyes ever followed, forcing him in the direction of his own house where lay the stiffened, spurned body of Ismail. Suddenly

they jumped ahead of him, to disappear through his own garden gate.

"His panting figure sprawled over the exhausted pony's back as they turned in, to be met by a terrified scream from the diminutive flying form of Ferid's only and beloved daughter, aged seven, her *chaddar* a mass of flames. She fled sobbing, not knowing where she ran, past her father and down the steep hill road. Unable to move, he was horrified at the plight of the only being whose wishes he had ever considered before his own. Of its own accord the pony wheeled, and clattered down the uneven stony road after the child, whose cries of distress could be heard now near, now far, as the descent wound away in hair-pin bends.

"Somehow Ferid-ud-Din kept his seat as the pony slithered and slipped over the loose stones. At the last bend he saw his daughter, still a mass of flames, fling herself blindly over the edge of the cliff where she fell sheer to the rocky lake hundreds of feet below. As if drawn by a magnet, the pony followed. Half-way down, horse and rider crashed on to an outcrop of rock with a sickening thud, before they hurtled unto the water below.

"A sudden wind sprang up, angrily ruffling the surface of the lake, to die down a moment later, leaving a sullen calm the more intense by contrast."

Rumi paused dramatically.

"It is a well-known local fact," he continued, "that the lake exacts a toll of at least one life every year.

"The bodies were found next day, wrapped in clinging, slimy weeds, and were taken in silent procession up the hill whence they had come so violently a few hours before, to be received by the pathetic and frightened widow.

"The little girl, she said, had been playing in the garden the previous evening, while she herself was busied with household tasks. Suddenly the child came whimpering that a strange man was asleep in an outhouse. Together

they went in that direction, but before they got there the child clung to her mother in fear, as the door slowly opened and out crawled the decomposed and reeking body of Ismail, deposited there by her husband's order, and covered with a cloth. She drew the child to her, afraid to move, while the loathsome figure crawled slowly towards them. When but a yard away, it lifted the shapeless awfulness which should have been its head. From the empty eye sockets burned a light, growing brighter as mother and child clung to each other, terrified in the falling dusk.

"Brighter grew the light; darker the evening. A clap of thunder rolled from behind the hill. As it died away, a flash of lightning struck the ghoulish shape at their feet. The woman was rendered helpless by the shock of the lightning, which paralysed her legs, so that she fell to the ground, unable to move. How long she lay she could not say, but gradually strength returned. At last she dragged herself to the bungalow, where she lay exhausted until daylight.

"The body of the beggar?" she said. "You see that little heap of charred bones over there? . . . How I was not consumed by the same flames, I know not. Ayee . . ."

Rumi ceased. He broke the spell by producing a coloured handkerchief to mop his brow, damp with sweat despite the cold air through which we were passing.

We drove on in silence.

It struck us that until we reached Dehbid we had observed no mosques nor minarets in any of the villages. Where did the country people pray? Or did they? Rumi was indignant when we suggested that they did not.

"Of course my people pray," he retorted. "The Jumah Abassa is our code of religious laws, and the Quran is the chief holy book by which the Faithful swear. Quran is Arabic for 'reading' or 'to read.' Mankind was destined for Islam, but some fell from grace, to become Jews or

Christians (if you will pardon me). The original book lay within the volume of divine decrees of the Seventh Heaven. A devout Moslem used to wear the bulk of the Quran strapped to each arm and the rest somewhere about his person, contained in little round silver boxes engraved with texts. Our creed, proclaimed by the Mullahs each time they exhort the faithful to prayer, runs 'There is no God but the one God; Muhammad is the prophet of God; God's mercy upon him.' "

"Ali, nephew of the Prophet, who married Muhammad's daughter, especially appealed to our imagination. He was the most handsome man ever created. If his glory be weighed in the balance of exalted sense, against the highest mountains, they would appear as no more than a lentil seed, for the sun made a crown of glory in the shadow of his umbrella. Had not his perfections been in the idea of the Creator, Eve had remained eternally a virgin, and Adam a bachelor. Sparkling rubies hide themselves in the earth in mines, ashamed not to be bright enough to be counted among Ali's treasures. The sun is but a glittering beam of the clasp of his girdle. It were sinful to compare him with a man, for how could a poor earthly lamp pretend to compare with a diamond of the clearest water? He is the Lion of God, whence we say that a Persian lion would never kill a Shi'a, only a Sunni. If the victim of a lion said to him 'Ya Ali,' the lion would pass him by, but if he said 'Ya Omar,' the lion would straightway demolish him."

"That sounds very bigoted on the lion's part," we ventured.

Rumi was quite red in the face after his flight of eloquence, but defence of his religion spurred him to further efforts.

"The Sunnis retorted by saying that they considered it more meritorious to kill one Shi'a than seventy Christians," he said. "Originally our creed preached tolerance but

alas, fanatical priests have lost the view of the true teaching of the Prophet. They have forgotten that Abu Bekr, when Gezeas was preparing to set off on a campaign in Syria, said to him: 'You will find some religious persons that live retired in monasteries that purpose to serve God that way. Leave them alone.' "

Since arriving in Iran we had found several occasions upon which to re-arrange our conception of Islam, for the country has for long been devoutly Moslem, embracing the strict Shi'a faith. The former royal banner was surmounted by an open hand, the thumb and fingers denoting Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hassan, and Husein. Feasts and fasts played a large part in religious observances. During Ramadan, strict Muhammadans did not break their fast from the early dawn, when they could distinguish between a white thread and a black, until nightfall.

Rumi evidently considered it his duty to continue our religious education.

"The last of Ali's descendants," he said, "born in the Hegira 225, was spirited away when he had attained nine years. We Shi'as believe that he was taken by God himself, because of the wickedness of man, and that he will appear again to lead his people back to God. He disappeared from Samarra, the town of the golden domes, where are buried the Tenth and Eleventh Imams. There is a place in our country where the peasants say that a fine tomb is that of the Twelfth Imam, who went to heaven without dying, and who will come again to rule the world and to destroy all unbelievers. The earth being thus deprived of a visible Lord, the King of Kings of my land has naturally deputed for him."

There was no disputing his statement, so we let the matter drop.

At last we drew up to display our passports at Abaday, and drove past the local cinema which was showing a Tarzan film, and far enough beyond the village to secure

ourselves from the unwavering stare of small boys, while we ate our luncheon. As usual the staple fare was boiled eggs, but the D.P. made no comment, and swallowed two in silence; he who complained at the flavour of his English eggs when the hens had been fed upon rose petals!

Nomad peasants trudged past us, in voluminous stiff felt coats, like those worn by Kurds, hats carelessly flung upon close-cropped hair. Like snails, they carried their all upon their backs. Behind them trailed women in coarse black or deep blue cotton cloaks, partially drawn to hide their faces. Although only three o'clock in the afternoon, already the mountains were assuming the purple-blue tinge of evening; and we still had as far to go as from London to Bristol, over a very different surface. Ruined khans punctuated the landscape every few hundred yards. Gradually the hills closed in around us. A small grey owl on a heap of stones winked a beady eye. The shepherds of a large mixed flock crouched over a blazing fire.

A sudden turn and drop came in the road, and we saw Yezdikast, a large, half-ruined village perched precariously on the edge of a deep gash in the plain, between a wide stream and sheer rock, buildings shored up by boulders and stones, and propped with tree trunks which looked as though they would crash to the ground at any moment. Wooden balconies stuck out upon horizontal rafters with no support.

We passed a motor-bus crammed with peasants. A few years ago it would have been impossible for them to travel without serious danger, and many would never have left their birthplace except at the whim of the Shah himself. We drove through the deepening dusk, soft browns and greens in the foreground fading into mulberry, grape purple, and finally into steel blue, against misty grey clouds. With a stretch of imagination we might almost be driving over Scottish moors. In the half light of evening the

corner of a khan, peeping from among the trees, might have been the tower of an English country church. By the roadside great stacks of gathered brushwood looked like shrivelled discoloured seaweed.

Twilight deepened into night. A crescent moon rose in the sky, cut in two by the finger of Muhammad. Cold and tired and stiff, we rattled on towards Isfahan, feeling as if we had travelled for weeks upon the back of a mule or a donkey, instead of only for hours in a car.

"The fatigue of a journey cuts off a man's voice at the lips and halves his understanding," murmured Rumi, capping our unspoken thoughts.

At last, topping a rise, we saw a blaze of lights. It was Isfahan again. Stopping at the inevitable police post we feasted our eyes upon the comforting electricity. What heeded we that it came from a modern factory, more than unattractive in the cold light of day? We had arrived, and almost fell into our beds. Thank Heaven for European comfort once more.

PART II

THE STREAM OF TIME

CHAPTER XIII

THE EARLY PERSIAN PICTURE

IRAN's early story holds miasmal place in the history of the world.

The plateau at the spur of her foothills is held to be the oldest known site of civilization. In legend, the Persian empire began three thousand years after the creation of the world. Poets were her historians, who embellished her romance and shrouded fact with an aura of heroic fiction. Thus we know her but vaguely; not the fault of scholarship, but because the tale is as remote as the country.

Firdausi's great epic, the *Shah-a-Nama*, the Book of Kings, is clad in picturesque garb; but for more accurate knowledge we must turn to Herodotus, who wrote that originally Iran was small and rugged. Plato dubbed her a nation of herdsmen, who roamed over a rude country which fostered a hardy race able to support intense cold and to endure the turmoil of war. From scant records the early picture has been pieced together. The hills of Persia sent virile stock westwards to subjugate the ancient civilizations of Elam, Akkad, and Sumer, taking with them not only their gods and kings, but their laws and customs. Susian sculpture and pottery of the fourth and third millennia displayed vivid imagination and skill. A recent archæological expedition, working on the steppes near the Caspian Sea, found that about three thousand years before Christ, although the people sacrificed

human beings, they were fundamentally peaceful and settled, building organized villages close to each other.

Before the last two thousand five hundred years, although Iran was near the centre of civilization, her record lay wrapt in mystery. The first known king of the earliest Persian dynasty was Keiomarz, the Zoroastrian Adam. Some go so far as to say that he was Noah's grandson; others, that he was a descendant of Shem. Sufficient that his dynasty, the Pishdadians, the Law Givers, reigned for more than seven centuries.

The tale began to crystallize with the reign of Jamshid, the founder of Persepolis. Zohak warred against Jamshid, lost, was chased to China and sawn the whole length of his spine with the backbone of a fish. In legends he is shown as a monster from whose shoulders depended snakes. The Man of Ten Bad Qualities eventually seized his throne. He, in turn, was deposed by a blacksmith who raised Feridoun to power. Feridoun adopted the leathern apron of his protector as the royal standard. Like Noah, who divided the earth between his sons Ham, Shem, and Japheth, Feridoun portioned his huge kingdom among three sons. The land from the Djihoun to the Euphrates, the Indian Ocean, and the Caspian, he called Iran; perhaps after his mother, Iran Dokt, or from Aryana, the whole of Southern Asia, excluding Persia, Media, and Bactria. Sufficient that the term Iranian means noble or venerable, and that the country people claim that their stock is the origin of the great Aryan civilization which triumphed over the Semites.

Although those were the days of bloody and thoughtless deeds, they were also days of wisdom. An ancient monarch left this advice to his grandson: "My son, consider all the days of your reign as so many leaves of a book; take care how you write upon any page, except what you wish to have read by posterity."

Kaus, identified with Cyaxerxes, is supposed to have

reigned a hundred and thirty years and to have attempted an ascent to Heaven in a car drawn by two eagles (the first aeroplane!). He founded a race of giants whom he called Kausi.

At the beginning of the first millennium before Christ, Rustam, legendary hero of Persia, saved her kings and peoples from oppression. Then came the Medes, Aryans all, their capital at Ecbatana, now Hamadan. Cattle-owners without culture, they roamed the countryside until they met the might of Assyria, when they suffered the lot of all shepherd races. Susa, where Daniel was perhaps thrown to the lions, was sacked by Sardanapalus, when the Assyrians carried the Medes into slavery, making public mockery of their gods. They had been cowed for centuries, until, about seven hundred years before Christ was born, they repulsed their Assyrian masters, captured Bactria, and rose to fame with the Persians, sweeping the once mighty Assyria clean off the face of the earth in the spectacular sack of Nineveh. Sardanapalus, his wives, and his children leaped into a blazing funeral pyre to complete the drama. So utter was the ruin that years later, when Xenophon and his ten thousand Greeks marched by, they failed to recognize the once famous city.

The stage was set for the next act. A king of the Medes feared to marry his daughter to a Median nobleman, lest a dream be fulfilled that she would produce an heir to oust him, so he married her to one Cambyzes, a Persian of good family. Soon afterwards the king ordered her to entrust her son Cyrus to Harpagus, who was told to slay him. Anxious not to have royal blood on his hands, however, Harpagus substituted the body of a still-born babe and sent Cyrus with a peasant's wife into the hills. While playing at kings, the boy showed the power within him by compelling one of his playmates to be chastised for revolt. The father of the victim, a nobleman, related to the king that his son had been beaten by a shepherd boy.

The king commanded that Cyrus be brought before him, and discovered him to be none other than his grandson, who from that time was brought up at court. Unable to stand the constant royal anger and, aided and abetted by Harpagus, Cyrus ran away, forming a band pledged to eject his grandfather from the throne. The king discovered Harpagus's duplicity and punished him at a royal banquet by serving his own son to him on a platter. A few years later Cyrus marched against the capital, took his grandfather prisoner, and brought Media under Persian rule. About 550 B.C. he founded the Archæmenid dynasty.

He concentrated upon war. Despite the fabulous wealth and the Spartan and Babylonian allies of Cræsus, Cyrus marched a thousand miles to defeat him. He then attacked Afghanistan, and quietly descended upon Babylon, digging ditches to deflect the water of the Euphrates from organized channels through the city, leaving dry paths along which his army could advance. Waiting until Belshazzar and his guests were feasting, he found even the sentinels drunk; and entered the city unopposed. He decreed that the captive Jews be allowed to return to their native land to rebuild their temple. He had a reign of conquests, but found time to organize a central government, and laid the foundation of the system which Darius, the administrator, was to perfect. Cyrus was slain in battle against a queen of Scythia, who was so incensed with him for killing her son that she severed his head and threw it into a bowl of blood, exclaiming:

"Thou wantest blood. I give thee thy fill."

Legend says he was buried at Meshed, the Place of Martyrdom. Upon his tomb he had inscribed: "I am Cyrus, son of Cambyses, founder of the Persian monarchy and Sovereign of Asia. Grudge me not therefore this monument."

His empire stretched from the outskirts of Greece and Rome, and included Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, and parts

of Afghanistan, India, and even China. Persia became the hub of the world.

Although much territory was lost to the Greeks, and then to the Saracens in the conquests of Alexander and Islam, great generals kept together an empire which for over two thousand five hundred years had a national being. Medes and Persians, Parthians and Sassanians, Mongols and Tartars, merged into one, despite the Greek, Roman, Arab, Turkish, Russian, aye, and even British hordes which swept through the land.

Although Cyrus planned the invasion of Egypt, it remained for Cambyses to carry out the project with the army his father had trained. The desert was the main obstacle. Arab allies brought water on the backs of camels to various places along the route; although the story goes that he owed his success in Egypt to driving in front of his army a number of cats, sacred to the Egyptians, who preferred to be conquered rather than risk injuring a cat. Cambyses committed suicide, whereupon a priest pretended to be his brother and usurped the throne. Massacring all who knew the real prince, he sought to gain popular favour by remitting taxes; but he was murdered by seven chiefs, who decided that he whose horse first neighed should be king, and should receive the support of the other six. The day before the matter was to be settled, Darius's groom led his master's horse to a mare, whereupon the horse neighed. With a little management the mare was tethered near the scene of the morrow's conference. The rest was easy. When the horse neighed, a peal of thunder rang out as if in approbation—an excellent portent.

Darius sent his armies far and wide, more and more arrogantly demanding the homage of earth and water. So peremptory were his requests that the Athenians threw his heralds into the Pit of Punishment, and the Lacedæmonians pitched them into wells, telling them there to procure the earth and water their autocratic king demanded.

He triumphed by sheer character. As a warning to rebels, he would seize his victims, cut off ears, nose, and tongue, and gouge out their eyes, leaving them chained to the gate of the palace until they were finally impaled.

A few years later Darius sallied forth against the Scythians, who were giving trouble in Asia Minor. Backed by a large fleet, he crossed the Bosphorus and the Danube upon a bridge of boats, but found that his nomad enemy had vanished into thin air, so he sent an army of a hundred thousand further into Europe on a war of conquest. Not thinking the subjection of Greece would be difficult, he advanced once again. Two routes were open to him: one through Asia Minor, and the other across the Ægean Sea. He decided to go overland. The outcome was Marathon, a battle which more than any other affected the history of the world. He sent his fleet of six hundred ships into the bay a few miles north-east of Athens. Greek cavalry could not operate over the hilly shores, so nine thousand Athenians and a thousand Plateans, under Miltiades, occupied the ground, facing fifty thousand Persians. Miltiades extended his centre and charged upon the Persian host, who were taken by surprise, amazed that so small a force, unsupported by cavalry, should attack the flower of their army. Leaving six thousand dead, the Persians took to their heels and fled to the ships, the enemy hot upon them. The invincible army of the King of Kings was at last humbled, and by a few Athenians defending their homes.

The first Darius died four hundred and eighty-five years before Christ was born. His son Xerxes, otherwise Ahasuerus, beloved of Esther the Jewess, followed his father upon the throne. He first suppressed rebellions in Egypt and Babylon. To attack his old enemies in Greece he formed an army of two millions, including camp followers, women, and eunuchs, drawn from all over the Persian empire.

THE EARLY PERSIAN PICTURE

The famed Immortals, the cream of the king's own troops, wearing garlands, led the way. Then came Medes and Persians armed with lance, bow, and sword; followed by Assyrians in bronze helmets; Bactrians, Arians, and Parthians with javelins and spears; Sakæ wielding battle-axes; Ethiopians with painted bodies, long bows, and stone-headed arrows; others with helmets of horses' heads; and Indians. War chariots were drawn by wild asses, cavalry were armed with lassoes, and Arabs rode camels. The navy boasted over a thousand ships. Three thousand transport vessels completed the astonishing total. That such numbers could be fed and moved at all bespoke high organization. They built a bridge across the Hellespont, another across the Strymon, and cut a canal through Athos. Supply depots were prepared along the route.

The army swept all before them until Leonidas and a few thousand men contested the pass of Thermopylæ, only a few yards wide, through which the Persian army had to pass. A report to Xerxes stated: "The Greeks hold the pass but they are few, and occupy their time in performing athletics and combing their long hair." Yet they could not be dislodged. Thousands of Persians were killed in their heavy armour, until a traitor disclosed the path over the mountains. The hopeless gallantry of three hundred Spartans earned them the epic place they hold in history.

As for the fleet, a storm sank four hundred ships, each with a crew of two hundred. The Greeks captured others after a sortie. Yet more were lost in another storm. The remainder were forced to give battle in narrow waters, and lost more than two hundred vessels in the most decisive naval battle of all time—Salamis.

Disheartened by the tragic news from Thermopylæ, the Greeks collapsed. Xerxes occupied Athens, massacred those who remained, and burned the temples, deciding to abandon his project of European conquest. Leaving three

hundred thousand troops to subjugate Greece, he took ship. Tens of thousands of his followers were left to fend for themselves. They perished from hunger and thirst.

In 479 B.C., at the famous battle of Platæa, the valiant Spartans again defeated the Persians against fearful odds. On the same day the Greeks scattered the Persian fleet and army at Mycalæ. The dual event was the beginning of the end of the first Persian empire.

Xerxes returned to a life of lechery. Enamoured of his brother's wife, he next craved the daughter. His own wife, jealous to a fault, enticed her sister-in-law into her power that she might inflict devilish tortures upon her.

Xerxes was murdered by the captain of his guard. His reign had been a tragedy of wasted opportunity. He had squandered his country's wealth and power and morale in wanton ways, and his own life in debauchery.

After him came Artaxerxes, with a long reign of more rebellions and conquests, and yet more naval actions. Kings rose and fell, vainly seeking to stay the decline of their empire.

The stage was well set for the Great Alexander.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREAT ALEXANDER

THE Macedonians were virile and brave, rejoicing in the chase which bred men and women fit to play their part in war. Licentious in their debauchery, they countered manly virtues with weakness. Drunkards, beset by family strife, and inseparable from polygamy, they gloried in blood feuds.

Alexander was born in the first year of the hundred and sixth Olympiad, says Plutarch, on the night when the temple at Ephesus was burned—considered a sure sign that someone great had been ushered into the world. His father was Philip of Macedon, although Olympias declared that she was with child by a dragon.

Of outstanding qualities as a boy, when Alexander grew up he tamed Bucephalus, the horse that none could ride. Noting that it was frightened of its own shadow, he rode always into the sun. His father exclaimed that one so observant must look beyond Macedonia for his kingdom. For five years Aristotle was Alexander's tutor, a splendid grounding for any young man. At the age of fifteen, as Governor of Macedonia, he quelled a rebellion when his father was fighting abroad. Three years later he achieved his first real victory. His next problem was when his father left the beautiful Olympias to carry on as best she might. So angry was the boy that he went straight to her, only to be recalled by his father.

When Philip was assassinated, Alexander succeeded to the throne at the early age of twenty, dying thirteen years

later at the end of a meteoric career. He inherited not only rank and power, but a military machine which bade fair to make Philip master of Asia. Having punished those who killed his father, although only a stripling Alexander showed early signs of wise and moderate rule, and soon had his subjects at his feet. Not only did he master Thrace, he destroyed Thebes, and declared war on the Persians who for long had ravaged Greece; rapidly acquiring a reputation for prowess in the field, until his name inspired terror among his enemies. He lived with his soldiers and shared their privations.

Starting off early in 334 B.C. with about thirty thousand infantry and four thousand cavalry, high in morale because of their victories, but with a debit balance at the bank, he counted upon further success to bring him recruits and cash. He defeated the Persians largely because they arrogantly refused to use their Greek mercenaries, relying upon twenty thousand cavalry to carry the day. The cavalry finally collapsed and galloped away, leaving the despised Greek mercenaries to face the renowned Macedonian phalanx invented by Philip. Sardes surrendered with scarcely an effort, giving Alexander the run of Asia Minor and untold wealth. Morale soared higher than ever.

Until that time Alexander had only tackled distant governors. He then had to face the might of the Great King himself. By a night attack after a forced march he captured the Cilician Gates, where a mere handful of resolute men might have arrested his progress.

Shortly afterwards he fought the decisive battle of Issus. The Persians obligingly arranged themselves in a narrow plain unsuitable for manœuvring large numbers. So luxurious was the Persian camp that the king's establishment alone kept nearly three hundred cooks, eighty-seven cup bearers, forty-seven perfumers of the royal body, and sixty-six attendants to care for the garlands.

Over half a million Persians and thirty thousand Greek mercenaries opposed Alexander, but they lacked leadership and fled before his charge, Darius in the van. Over a hundred thousand Persians lay dead on the field of battle. Alexander captured much of the royal equipage, the queen of Darius, his mother, and his children, treating them with marked courtesy.

Marching down the coasts of Syria and Palestine, he besieged Tyre and destroyed Persia's sea power. Annexing Egypt, he marched eastwards to the Euphrates and the Tigris, unhampered by the Persians, who had every chance to defend the river fords and to manœuvre their huge forces in the sandy plains. Near the ruins of Nineveh, upon a plain some seventy miles from Arbela, he rounded upon Darius and a force of a million men.

Confident in their nobility and morale, the Macedonians calmly prepared a secure base. Alexander made a personal reconnaissance of the battlefield, refusing to attack at night because he thought it would be snatching victory. The famous Immortals formed the core of the Persian army, flanked by the bodyguard, the horse-guards, fifteen elephants, fifty chariots, and the Greek mercenaries.

Alexander trailed his coat the length of the Persian front. Darius, instead of ordering a general attack, tried to manœuvre, but found himself entering country over which his chariots and elephants were useless. Too late, he sounded the charge. The phalanx opened out that the chariots might pass through their ranks to the tender mercies of the cooks and butchers behind. Alexander saw a gap near Darius and counter-attacked. Away went the Persians, headed once again by their king. The retreat, pursued as far as Arbela, was the end of the might of Darius, who fled to Ecbatana, hundreds of miles away, leaving his army to follow as best it could.

Subduing Babylon, Alexander straightway marched three hundred miles to Susa, where lay the treasure house

of the Great King. Susa, the Lily, was a fine city rich in culture, with enamelled bas-reliefs like those upon the Ishtar Gateway at Babylon. He crossed the Karun river near Ahwaz, seized Persepolis and a vast store of wealth, burned the palaces, and massacred the people. Marching upon Ecbatana, he discovered that Darius had already fled to the Caspian. The Macedonians, hoping to catch Darius at Rhages, found that Bessus, a local governor, had assassinated him before he fled, leaving the still warm body for them to find. One tale runs that they came upon Darius dying of his wounds, pleading for water. When his cry was met with courtesy, he exclaimed: "It is the greatest of my misfortunes that I cannot reward thy humanity. Beg Alexander to accept my warmest thanks for the tenderness with which he has treated my wretched family, whilst I am doomed to perish by the hand of a man who I have loaded with kindness."

Alexander had the body shrouded in his own mantle.

Seizing the Persian empire, he made the lives of the wretched inhabitants a burden, marching them from place to place as slaves and labourers. Hearing that Bessus had assumed the title of the Great King, Alexander pursued him. He crossed the Hindu Kush, captured Bessus, and crucified him for the part he had played when he betrayed Darius.

In 327 B.C. Alexander invaded India with a hundred thousand men, defeating strong forces by his supreme discipline. Before he could conquer the world, however, he had to return whence he came. His men were tired of victory. They wanted to go home with their spoils, so he sent them back through the Khyber Pass, while organizing a campaign in Swat. He knew not who to send in command of a naval expedition from India up the unknown Persian Gulf.

"One excuses himself because he thinks the danger insuperable," he complained. "Another is unfit from

timidity. Others think of nothing but how to get home. Many more I cannot approve for a variety of reasons."

Nearchus, a native of Crete, came forward.

"Under the protection of God, I will conduct the fleet safely into the Gulf of Persia; if the sea be navigable, and the undertaking within the power of man to perform," he said.

Alexander gave him full authority.

Before embarking on his maritime adventure, Nearchus sacrificed to Jupiter and held Olympic Games. He then assembled his fleet and put to sea, to find that the problem of fresh food presented an unforeseen difficulty, nothing but fish being obtainable along the coast. At one juncture, perceiving human beings upon the beach, he hove to. His men jumped out of the ship, swam ashore, and attacked, presumably in full battle array, for record says that the natives were so frightened by the glittering armour that they ran away. They were queer people, with hairy bodies and heads, and long strong nails developed by slicing the fish upon which they lived. They dwelt in hovels at the water's edge, and had no iron, nor metal, their spearheads being fashioned of wood hardened by fire. They wore the skins of animals and large fishes.

Nearchus wrote an account of his voyage, complaining frequently and bitterly of the indifferent anchorages, which he found in some places intolerably stony, and in others engulfed to a great depth with loose slime. He sailed up the coast while Alexander made his way by land, both doubting whether they would ever see the other again. They met triumphantly and entered Susa, celebrating with marriages and wild debauchery.

They moved to Babylon.

Emboldened by his success on land, Alexander once more turned his attention to the sea, and summoned Nearchus. Banquet followed banquet until, on the eighteenth day of Desius, Alexander felt the symptoms of fever.

Six days later he was grievously ill, and summoned his generals to his bedside. When they reached him the fever was higher than ever. On the twenty-seventh, his soldiers clamoured to gaze upon their beloved leader because they thought he was dead. They were allowed to file through the room, to see for themselves. He died at the age of thirty-two, on the evening of the twenty-ninth day of Desius, in 323 B.C. at Babylon; dying, say captious critics, of a prolonged "hang-over."

His wasted body was first laid in a golden coffin, until Seleucius, one of his favourite generals, replaced it by a glass one, which in those days was more precious than gold or silver. His warriors, stricken with grief, shaved their heads and clipped their horses' manes.

He had sold whole peoples into slavery, and chained many poor wretches to his gates that they might open them for distinguished visitors. He fed prisoners to hungry lions to provide sport for jaded appetites. Others were thrown into Persian pools to feed the fishes. A promiscuous bridegroom, he married Statira, a daughter of Darius, at the same time presenting Persian brides to his Macedonian captains, sending nine thousand invitations for the weddings, giving all the guests golden cups, and paying their debts. He also married the beautiful Roxana, who later gave birth to his heir, and who tortured Statira to death in fiendish jealousy.

Much of Alexander's tale has been lost. He built altars wherever he went, impressing Macedonian art upon more primitive forms; although his Greeks left surprisingly little influence on Persian art.

The dynasty lasted but one reign. Olympias tortured and murdered claimants to the throne—man, woman, and child—without scruple, until she in her turn was stoned to death. Roxana and her son fell into evil hands and were slaughtered.

The record of the next five centuries reveals no star of

magnitude in the eastern firmament. After Seleucius came the Parthians, who, although they left little to posterity, at least were virile and ruled with a will.

Athenæus wrote contemptuously of those times, saying that of all nations the Persians were the first to become notorious for their luxury. The kings spent the winter at Susa, the summer at Ecbatana, the autumn at Persepolis, and rioted the rest of the year in Babylon. The court nobles combined strict Persian discipline with Median efficiency, the former soon giving way to the latter. They sat on their horses more softly than they lay on their beds.

After the Parthians, the legendary Ardeshir founded the Sassanian dynasty, when began the wars between Persia and the Holy Roman Empire, which dragged on until the seventh century. Ardeshir was succeeded by Shapur, and later by Bahram. Then came Shapur the Great with a long and vital reign. The menace of the White Huns came and passed.

The valiant Khosroe held the stage. He besieged Rome, took Jerusalem, overran Egypt, and became king of Persia, Syria, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor.

About that time the might of Muhammad began to be felt. At the zenith of his power, he wrote to the king of Persia, inviting him to submit to the Book, to the Sword, and to the Tribute. The king replied in no uncertain tones:

"Drinkers of camel's milk, eaters of lizards!
To this pass hast come with the Arab?
That he dares to aspire to the crown of the Kyanees!
I spit on thee, fickle fate! I spit on thee!"

Too much has been written about Muhammad to justify further account here, save for a brief sketch of his career. Well born among the Bedouin, he became a caravan leader and travelled over much of the eastern world. Gradually he evolved a new doctrine and a new teaching, in spite of persecution. When he was over

fifty, he fled from Mecca to Medina in 622, which became the first year of the Hejira. Marrying a rich and influential widow, his teaching gradually gripped the mind of Asia. Amid fierce battles and campaigns Islam took a firm grip upon the eastern world.

With the passage of time, ten years after Muhammad's flight the Saracens under Khalid invaded Persia; were repulsed; but returned and won a battle upon the plains of Cadesia, after which they sternly suppressed the cult of fire-worship.

In due time the Seljuk Turks gave new life to the failing force of Islam, and overran Persia. They reached their zenith under Malik Shah at the end of the eleventh century, fading into sudden obscurity with the rise of strong shepherd kings from further east. But the Assassins first had to paint their exotic picture.

CHAPTER XV

DISCIPLES OF DEATH

FROM days of widespread disorder and vicious rule, it was a short carry to what in all conscience must be the prime example of religious ecstasy gone mad.

Alamut, the Eagle's Nest, fifty miles from Kazvin, was the home of the Mardi, a poor race of hunters. About the time of the Battle of Hastings, one Hassan-i-Sabah, born at Qum, son of a Persian prince, founded a secret society which came to be known as the Assassins. Contemporary with, and some say friend of, Omar Khayyam, Hassan was sent to study at Nisapur, where he met a fellow-student named Nizam-ul-Mulk. Legend says that they decided that whoever first became great should befriend the other. When Nizam-ul-Mulk, vizier to one of the Seljuk monarchs, remembered the pact, he put his friend in charge of the privy purse. One day the king demanded to see the balance sheets. Hassan begged forty days' grace, but when came the time of reckoning several pages were missing, and he was exiled. Perhaps Nizam stole the sheets himself to prevent his one-time friend from becoming *persona grata* with the king.

Hassan went to Egypt where he began to formulate his new doctrine, and where he was received with honour. Posing as a prophet, he wandered over Syria and Palestine for nearly ten years, gathering a goodly following before returning to Persia, capturing strongholds as he went. By a bold stratagem he took the Eagle's Nest, hitherto an impregnable rock. Once installed there, he built a fortress

at the entrance, strong enough to resist the known forces of Asia. Security was assured.

Thus a new word was coined: *assassin*, from Followers of Hassan, although Sylvestre de Sacy says the word was corrupted by the Crusaders from *hashish*. In those days the secret of *hashish* was jealously preserved among a few savants. Hassan did not encourage habitual use of the drug, for he found that over indulgence engendered lethargy and weakness. Sufficient that the creed of assassination became, in the words of Bernard Shaw, the extreme form of censorship.

The sect consisted of the Grand Master or Mountain Chief, whom the Crusaders nicknamed *Le Vieux*, or Old One, the Old Man of the Mountains. Beneath him came the Grand Priors or Propagandists (a word having a strangely modern significance). A number of ordinary Priors knew most of the secrets. Lower grades of the Order were Companions, told as much as was good for them; Adherents, vowing loyalty; and Destroying Angels, who spread the terror abroad.

Christian, Moslem, and Jew do as they are bid because they hope to go to Heaven when they die. Hassan hit upon the idea of creating a Heaven on earth, that the credulous might blindly follow him. The Eagle's Nest, set in a rich valley among shaded trees and exquisite blooms, and sheltered from prying eyes, was well suited to his purpose. There was but one entrance, *hashish*; but one conception, Heaven; but one final exit, death.

Secure in his fastness, and successful, the Old One set captive slaves to make the valley into a garden, rare and exotic as only a Persian garden can be, filled with every fruit and blossom the heart might desire, and where flowed runnels of wine. Therein he built golden palaces. He sought to delude his flock that this was the true and only Paradise, so he fashioned it after the teaching of Muhammad; to wit, a garden running with wine and milk

and honey, and teeming with graceful women to please the Faithful (save the word!).

Beauteous damsels, thinly veiled, were collected from divers countries in the name and the cause of this new religion. They drifted about palace and lawn, singing and dancing in a manner both charming and provoking. Nymphs were the stock-in-trade; rich merchants the customers. Hassan needed salesmen. He chose adolescent youths, telling them of the Paradise awaiting those who implicitly obeyed his will. They were invited to a private view, lest they doubted. Wish being father to thought, it was not surprising that folk began to believe in the new creed, any more than it was surprising that Muhammad gained his adherents. The chances were that the more practical policy of the Assassins would have a stronger appeal than the parent faith of Islam.

The recruits ripe for plucking, the Old Man gave them *hashish* to send them into a deep sleep, when they were carried within, to awaken one by one in the garden. Crediting their own eyes, and comparing notes with their friends, naturally they believed what they beheld. Wandering at will among faery delights, under the influences of the drug, they trod upon air. Time was of no consequence. Indeterminate pleasure was indefinitely prolonged. Joyous minutes became hours; hours days; days infinite.

When the fledgelings had absorbed the celestial beauty of the new playground, they were drugged again and shown the door; as essential a part of the business as the entry. When they came to, the Old One himself told them, bewildered and excited as they recovered from their happy adventures, that by divine grace they had been permitted to gaze upon the Garden of Paradise, and to taste an iota of its promise. Why wait? To achieve this happy haven they had but to do as he bade them. Certain unbelievers in the world must be removed. There was nothing else for it. Only Disciples from the valley could

apply the spur. Reward was the Paradise they had just seen, where they might dwell for ever. The evidence of their own senses made the prospect more than alluring.

Thus were they initiated into the Order of Destroying Angels, trained in the art of disguise, to speak several languages, and to endure fatigue. Acting as spies, proud of their rôle, eager to achieve merit in Paradise, they sought a spectacular end for their victims, preferring a holy day to kill. Many calmly awaited the onslaught of maddened crowds, welcoming death. The more publicity they achieved, the higher would the Old One be likely to install them in the life to be. So sure were they of Heaven that their own mothers would weep when their sons returned from their quests alive.

Often the victims were subject to blackmail. A student asked a well-known and pious professor of theology if he believed in the new creed. Before he could reply, the youth handed him a note promising death unless a satisfactory answer were at once made public, for which the professor would receive a bag of gold. Piety taking a back pew, he decided there was only one answer. Twitted for his sudden change of front, the professor excused himself, saying he was convinced by the point of the argument on the one hand, and the weight of the evidence in the other!

The power of the Assassins became a byword from Cathay to Cairo. In desperation, a Seljuki king set forth with a large army to exterminate them. He awoke one day to find a dagger thrust into the earth beside his pillow, bearing a message that, if he persisted, the dagger would quiver in his heart. Hastily he retraced his steps.

A century later Marco Polo gave to the world a classic description of the sect, too good to miss:

"When, therefore, they awoke and found themselves in a place so charming, they deemed it was Paradise in very truth. And the ladies and damsels dallied with them to

their heart's content, so that they had what young men would have; and with their own will would they never have quitted the place.

"Now this prince, whom we will call the Old One, kept his court in grand and noble style, and made those simple hill-folk about him believe firmly that he was a great prophet. And when he wanted any of his Ashishin to send on any mission, he would cause that potion whereof I spoke, to be given to one of the youths in the garden, and then have him carried into his palace. So when the young man awoke, he found himself in the Castle, and no longer in that Paradise, whereat he was not overwell pleased. He was then conducted to the Old Man's presence and bowed before him with great veneration, as believing himself to be in the presence of a true prophet. The Prince would then ask from whence he came, and he would reply that he came from Paradise, and that it was exactly such as Mahomet has described it in the law. This, of course, gave the others who stood by and who had not been admitted, the greatest desire to enter therein.

"So when the Old Man would have any prince slain, he would say to such a youth, 'Go thou and slay So-and-So, and when thou returnest my angels shall bear thee into Paradise. And shouldst thou die, nevertheless so will I send my angels to carry thee back into Paradise.' So he caused them to believe, and thus there was no order of his that he would not afront any peril, for the great desire that they had to get back into that Paradise of his. And in this manner the Old One got his people to murder anyone he desired to get rid of."

Hassan thus freed himself of his enemies, and black-mailed rich merchants and princes, amassing great wealth. One of his first victims was his erstwhile comrade and betrayer, Nizam. Thousands of Disciples were only too eager to obey Hassan, and to renounce a life they found dull after the Paradise still tingling in their senses. Many a

hot-headed young man went to a death he welcomed. Thus the Old One was spared the depressing sight of their return, perhaps jaded and disillusioned, to what rapidly became a full house.

A Crusader, with a small band of men, finding himself at the Eagle's Nest, once tried to wean Hassan from the error of his ways. The conversation turned to the subject of discipline, the Crusader boasting that his men would follow him anywhere. Had they not already accompanied him on a tedious journey all the way from England? Could Hassan command such loyalty? The Old One said not a word. Beckoning a Disciple, he signalled him to jump over the precipice before them. Without a moment's hesitation, the youth stepped into eternity.

Hassan did not practise what he preached. At the ripe age of ninety he died peacefully in his bed, an end far removed from the violent deaths of his flock. For thirty-five years he never quitted Alamut, and only twice left his chamber. He beheaded two of his sons, one of them because the boy was fond of the bottle.

A leader of the sect at Isfahan attracted a large following by unorthodox methods. People flocked to his banner partly because those who did not mysteriously disappeared in their hundreds. It took a woman to discover what happened. She heard groans coming from a house, where she found dozens of victims, some dead, some still alive; crucified, tortured, blind.

The end was as tragic as the reign. So many kings and nobles succumbed to the ambition of the House of Hassan, and to the ever-increasing tribute exacted, that the rulers of Persia called upon Hulagu and his Tartar hordes to rid the land of the battenning nuisance. Laying the surrounding country bare, they besieged the Eagle's Nest. The seventh Grand Master and his only son held out for three years.

The sect struggled on for some years more. At the end

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of the fourteenth century, Edward of England was wounded by a devotee in Syria, where a branch exists to-day, long since shorn of the bloody traits of the forbears.

In the nineteenth, and in the twentieth, century the Aga Khan began to win important racing events. His ancestor was the Old Man of the Mountains, and held unquestioned lien on the best colts bred by the Anaizah tribe near Kerbala in 'Iraq.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SCOURGE OF GOD

"FROM the fury of the Mongols, good Lord deliver us," ran the litany of many Christian churches, even into the early twentieth century, so keen was the memory of the distant Asiatic terror. No horror, no invasion so dread has since beset mankind.

Mongol came from *mong-ku*, Brave People. They were not of Chinese extraction—indeed, the Great Wall of China was built to withstand them. How the name Tartar came is uncertain, probably from Tar, wanderer or riser-up. Sufficient that after the year 1200, Tartars merged into Mongols, barbarians all. Perhaps they descended from the Huns of more than a millennium before. They were nomad shepherds who worshipped the sun. Near-to-nature beings, they were valiant, of unprecedented mobility and stamina, and were fine horsemen. They knew no culture save that of obedience. A square meal was by no means essential; nor was water, except to drink. The young men of the desert were brought up in a hard school, spending their days in the saddle on short commons, protecting the herds from raiding tribes without ruth. No wonder they were tough.

Their power came through the personality and influence of a nomad chieftain of the Gobi desert, the eldest son of Yesukai the Valiant, Khan of the Great Mongols, who was lord over forty thousand tents. The boy was called Temujin, Finest Steel, in Chinese written *T'ie mou jen*, Supreme Earth Man. He was brought up in a kind of permanent

tent which moved from place to place, and he became a wrestler and a master of Eastern intrigue.

His mother had been carried off in a raid, so he had to face a blood feud as well as tribal jealousies and greed. His father died when he was but thirteen, leaving him the chief of a wild people who needed strong leadership, beset as they were by enemies on all sides. He was soon forced into the rôle of fugitive, in lands which should have paid him tribute; but he remained in hiding, determined one day to enter into his inheritance. Gradually he found friends, and, by dint of personal bravery and an indomitable will, he won back the following of his father. The very qualities necessary for this achievement were those which were to ensure him the stupendous success that came his way.

He counselled his men to be brave if they wanted fortune. Like the Arabs and other shepherd peoples, they were arrogant and over-bearingly cruel, with a rough-and-ready sense of humour. Wielding the weapons of diplomacy and intrigue, Temujin, who became known as Genghis Khan, formed strong alliances to counter his jealous enemies. With twelve thousand Mongols under his banner, scattered widely on their way from summer to winter grazing grounds, he heard that thirty thousand were at hand, ready to strike. This, his first big battle, the forerunner of many, showed the hand of the master. Cavalrymen in armour wielding bows and arrows, shields and lances, and short swords, uttered wild yells as they charged in wild abandon, until some five thousand enemy lay dead, and the day was won. It was a triumph of leadership, of valour. Seventy enemy chiefs were boiled alive in huge cauldrons on the spot. The name of Genghis thenceforward became one with which to conjure.

He went from success to success. He captured a relative who had tried to oppose him. Asked what punishment this chief expected, the answer came "the slow

death," an affair which took weeks, and meant the loss of a joint of a limb each day until all had gone. A wave of kindness descended upon the victor, who sent his relation away to be strangled.

He made an alliance with Prester John, a Christian Emperor who ruled inner Asia, and a sworn friend of his father. Saying that "the strength of a wall is neither greater nor less than the courage of the men who defend it," he overran the Great Wall of China, and warred among the Asiatic tribes and confederations until he was undisputed master, with a following of tribal chiefs and kings and princes in their hundreds. When over sixty years old, in 1219, he invaded Persia and led his armies westwards in a blaze of glory, before the fading impotence of the Seljukee royal house and the Attabegs.

His Mongols turned their attention to Europe, to the alarm of dozens of petty states and kingdoms whose armies were defeated with alarming regularity. Hungary fell an easy prey.

Some authorities look on him as one of the greatest military geniuses of all time, although he never saw the sea. He and his Mongols, in seven league boots and spurs, raped continents, where other great captains merely ravished countries. Where they laid cities waste, he completely wiped them out. His name became so feared that his enemies gladly fled to the deserts and the hills rather than remain in his path. He left but few living things in his wake—jackals, wolves, vultures, carrion creatures all—to gorge themselves on the blood of his victims.

He mastered the generals of three great empires, and ruled from the China Sea to the Danube. The carnage he created as he raced on his way was traditional to the East, but somehow fiercer by its very speed. He owed his strength to his mobility, and invariably attacked with but a hundred thousand men. The God-Belonging Squadron was predominant as a suicide squad, a strange throwback

to the days of Xerxes's Immortals. In this Genghis followed Alexander's example. The greatest number he used, and that towards the end of his life, was about two hundred thousand. His achievement was all the more remarkable because he often fought thousands of miles from his base. The plan of invasion was to advance from several strategic points at once, giving his generals wide liberty of action, but insisting upon constant news so that he might be able to throw in his reserves at the right time and place. "They came, they uprooted, they burned, they slew, they ravished, they carried off, they departed."

He took care to reward those who served him well. Officers and men received the spoils of war; women and gold and loot, under a careful system. Those who rendered him signal service he created Paladins, who could do no wrong. They had the right to enter his tent at any time, and were exempt from taxes. Their heirs unto the ninth generation were to be as privileged as they.

Genghis set a new standard of discipline for an unruly empire, and made a code of laws for fifty races. It was said of the discipline he enforced that a virgin with a bag of gold could ride safely from China to Persia. He re-knit the caravan routes of Asia, every hundred miles or so setting a post-house, furnished with fine beds and rich silks. At some were four hundred horses. There were more than ten thousand of these posts, with three hundred thousand horses. His couriers wore a wide belt of bells, rode as in a relay race, and were the background of his organization.

He instituted the first close shooting season, ordering that "to keep the men of the army exercised, a great hunt shall be held every winter. On this account, it is forbidden any man of the empire to kill between the months of March and October, deer, bucks, roe-bucks, hares, wild ass, and some birds." It was the custom to ring game, driving it within an ever-narrowing circle, as a point of honour using no weapon until the last minute. First the Khan, then

a chosen few, singled out what beasts they fancied, before the other warriors weighed in. This ring campaign was also used to hunt human beings.

His laws acknowledged one God, Creator of Heaven and Earth. Religiously tolerant, Christians, Jews, Devil-Worshippers, Muhammadans, all were among his followers. He argued that "there is only one sun in the sky, and one strength in Heaven. Thus only one Kha Khan should be upon the earth," and he had engraved upon his seal: "God in Heaven. The Kha Khan, the Power of God on Earth. The seal of the Emperor of Mankind."

He died in 1227, the year of the Mouse in the Cycle of the Twelve Beasts. His dead body was dragged across Asia in a bloody cortège. By his dying command, every living thing for fifty miles on each side of the route paid the full price, lest someone should tell the world the Immortal Leader had vanished. No one knows where he was buried, but legend say that every year a white horse appears at the grave, and that a clan left to guard the tomb burned so much incense that a mighty forest grew and obscured the place. Legend also says that forty virgins, richly clad, and forty stallions were taken to the grave and slain in tribute.

The difference between Genghis and other great captains was that his empire lived after him. Unlike Alexander's, that of Genghis Khan did not fall to pieces at his death. Napoleon abandoned armies and saw his empire fall about his ears, and his sons disowned. Genghis left a virile legacy to Otogai, the son who succeeded him. Even his grandsons enjoyed their inheritance.

Genghis laid waste most of Southern Asia, and a large part of Europe, destroying, as a sadistic exercise, good and bad alike in a riot of licence. He was ably followed by Otogai.

After his death the vicious forces of disorder sought a new leader in a series of spectacular incidents which had

occupied more than a century. The leader these forces sought was a man who would raise order from chaos. The leader they got was a calamity. Their chaos was his order. His chaos was the real thing.

Hulagu destroyed the Assassins, and sacked Baghdad, where he and his men murdered a million in a week. Success came to him not because he was a valiant leader. He was weak, and prone to physical excess. But he was a grandson of Genghis. That was enough.

Kubila Khan, brother of Hulagu, held the last court of the Nomads, when Mongol power reached its zenith.

For much of this story we are indebted to Marco Polo, the Father of Geography, a Venetian adventurer who probably ranks as the greatest explorer before Columbus, setting forth into a dangerous new world wracked with peril, not for a year and a day, but for most of his life, into Asia, India, and even China. He began his travels when he was seventeen years old, with his father and an uncle who had already visited the East. They passed through Persia, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, calling on the court of Kubila Khan, whom they found to be so haughty that he threw scraps from his table to captured queens lying at his feet. The Polos made themselves invaluable at the powerful court of Kubila, but they were finally allowed to leave over a little matter of a new bride for the Shah of Persia. Pretty Princess Cocachin, a seventeen-year-old beauty, set sail with the Polos in 1292, escorted by fourteen ships carrying six hundred passengers.

After a quarter of a century abroad, the Polos returned to a Venice where they were not recognized, having long since been given up for dead. People not only refused to believe Marco's stories, but laughed at the things he described. No one credited that black stones in China were burned, and that in India nuts were as large as a man's head. Even when he lay dying, his friends begged him to face the Almighty with a clear conscience, and to

confess that much he had said was untrue. His only reply was that, if anything, he had understated the marvels he had seen.

His travels came to be written during his imprisonment, after he was caught in a naval battle against the Genoese, soon after his return. He grew so tired of telling his guards about his adventures that he thought it easier to write them down, so he dictated the account to a fellow prisoner, giving to the world a story of adventure extraordinary.

In those days the Mongols had a great empire which stretched from China, through Russia. They ruled Persia with supreme arrogance for about a hundred years, their power gradually decreasing until they were finally crushed by the sword of another great captain—Timur Gurkan.

Timur means Iron. Eastern historians called him Lord Timur the Splendid, the Lion, Lord of Good Fortune, the Earth Shaker. Son of a chieftain of a Turkish tribe, born in Tartary, in the Green City, in 1332, he grew up practised in the chase and the raid. On the death of his father he was appointed a Governor, but was superseded when Samarkand fell, and forced to flee.

At the age of about twenty he married the Lady Aljar, beautiful as the young moon and graceful as a young cypress tree. She went unveiled as did all her countrywomen, and brought with her a dowry. While she lived he took no other. Timur and Aljar had a son they named Jehangir, the World Gripper.

When the border Jat Mongols swept down from the north, Timur received their chief, Tugluk, as an honoured guest. With great pomp he entertained the visitor, who, struck by his fearlessness, made him the Commander of Ten Thousand, before returning to quell disturbances at home.

Timur later quarrelled with Tugluk, and rode into the desert with the Lady Aljar and about twenty followers, to be wounded in the foot with an arrow. From this

wound he became known as Timur the Lame or Timurlane. He and his brother-in-law, Husein, gradually assembled an army clad in Persian chain armour and carrying two-edged swords. The Lady Aljar died. Quarrelling with Husein, Timur demanded control from the Great City up to and including the river. He defeated Husein and was elected "Lord of Beyond the River and the Plains of Turan."

Timur then married Sarai Khanum, widow of Husein. Marching westwards along the Khorassan road, past Nisapur and Meshed, towards the Caspian, he returned to Samarkand to find that Jehangir had died.

On his way to stop revolts at Isfahan and Shiraz he finished off what was left of the Assassins, soon afterwards making a formal and bloodless entry into Isfahan. Rioting broke out. He at once ordered a massacre, bidding each Tartar return with several Persian heads. Seventy thousand heads rolled in the gutter that day. Shiraz followed suit a few weeks later and paid the same kind of ransom.

Timur next warred against the Golden Horde, marching across the Steppes of Siberia, the Land of Shadows.

Following in the footsteps of the fierce Mongols, he laid waste the ancient canal system of the fertile Mesopotamian plain, leaving a trail of stark ruin in his wake, and capturing Baghdad. Then he took Tekrit and distributed the garrison to his various regiments for torture. Two towers of human skulls were erected with what was left of the captives.

From Mesopotamia he marched against Russia for the second time, and sacked Moscow. At the turn of the century he invaded India, before campaigning against the Mamelukes and capturing Aleppo and Damascus, which latter city he burned to the ground, saving only one dome that served as the model for the Taj Mahal, built by one of his descendants. Returning to retake Baghdad, he

embarked upon his most formidable project, the defeat of Bayazid, a rival Asian conqueror, whose stronghold was in Angora.

Timur went far afield, not to conquer but to plunder for treasure. Excessively cruel, he was popularly supposed never to go to bed without having murdered somebody. His besetting sin was avarice. Once when he was out shooting he missed a deer. Shortly afterwards a peasant came by carrying a slain deer.

"He has killed my quarry," said the king. "Off with his ears."

The man offered the guards all the money he carried if they only cut a slice off each. Overhearing, the king promised the man his freedom if the money were paid direct to him. The petty sum involved was four *rials* (*a shilling*)!

Samarkand, once the capital of Genghis Khan, became known as the Blue City, from the tiles Timur brought from Herat. Like all nomads, he liked the blue of distant skies and high mountains. At Samarkand he heaped the treasures of Asia. In his palace courtyard he had a tree with a golden trunk, silver branches and leaves, and fruit of precious stones. On his triumphal return as an old man, in a wave of enthusiasm he assembled an army of two hundred thousand for a holy war against China. After an orgy of feasting and licentious carnival he marched on Cathay. In 1405, like Alexander, but nearly three times his age, Timur died of fever at Otrar. As he had wished, the army moved on, his riderless horse led beneath his standard. He had appointed Pir Muhammad, son of Jehangir, as successor, bidding him live at Samarkand with absolute civil and military authority; but when the body returned, dissension broke out, the army retracing its steps and catching up the funeral cortège. They found Samarkand closed, with Timur's grandson installed. He lived riotously and the great empire soon fell to pieces.

THE SCOURGE OF GOD

An Arab historian said that Timur was tall, with a fine head and a high forehead, and as remarkable for his physical strength as for his courage. His skin was white, and his complexion vivid, above a long beard. He had a deep voice and no sense of humour. Not only was he brave; he was wise and a leader, wading ruthlessly east and west through the blood of his enemies. Massacres, torture, rapine were the tools he used to gain the power he sought. Although in many respects his achievement ranked lower than that of Genghis Khan, Timur occupied more of the foreground of the Western picture.

Nor for two centuries did the country find another great leader—Shah Abbas.

CHAPTER XVII

SHUFFLE

TIMURLANE's death, early in the fifteenth century, left his Tartars no whip but their own, with which they flagellated the land in a wave of sensual enthusiasm.

The tide turned at the end of the century, when one Ismael captured Baku with a small force. Claiming descent from Ali, he was Shi'a to a fault. Using his sword, he laid the foundations of the fine Safavian dynasty, of whom Shah Abbas the Great was the chief star in the firmament. He reigned from 1587 to 1629.

The story goes that, hearing of his father's death, Abbas, being the second son, fled to Kurdistan with a thousand men to avoid being blinded by his brother, who sent messages entreating him to return; going so far as to guarantee his sight. But Abbas was wary. Besides, a court nobleman wrote to him suggesting that for a dukedom he would make the barber of the King of Kings cut the royal throat during the next shave. Abbas accepted. He created the traitor a duke, but the following day, using his prerogative, he asked the court what was the due of a loyal servant who yet caused his master's death. The traitor had the privilege of first reply, and could but answer that the servant should be punished. Straightway the Shah struck off the traitor's head with his own sword, saying that as he had betrayed his original master so might he serve the second.

One of Abbas's best strokes of diplomacy was when he realized that his entire army of about fifty thousand men

came from the Kizilbash tribe, and that he was at the mercy of their leaders. He formed a new tribe called the Friends of the Shah, to be a kind of royal bodyguard. Tens of thousands flocked to his banner, giving him the independence he sought.

Contemporary with Queen Elizabeth, during his long and difficult reign he did all he could to encourage peace and trade. Like Haroun-ar-Rashid, he was wont to wander in disguise among his people to see their lives for himself. To divert some of the wealth pouring into Mecca he instituted the Pilgrimage to Meshed.

He built a new Isfahan; and the Stone Carpet—a fine arched causeway of brick, three hundred miles long.

Once he murdered a slumbering traveller merely because the regal horse shied at the recumbent figure. Many are the tales told of his cruelty. One day, when he was out hunting, he saw a peasant whose face was so ugly that the Shah's horse shied and nearly threw him. Enraged, Abbas ordered the man to be beheaded for the crime of ugliness, which had so nearly caused an accident.

"Sire," said the peasant, greatly daring, "what must I call Your Majesty's features which have caused such a penalty?"

That got him off!

The Sultan of Turkey sent an ambassador with three hundred nobles to Isfahan, with the request that the Persian Crown Prince, aged about twelve, should visit the Sultan. The Turks had such a reputation for cruelty that Abbas refused, saying he would sooner go himself. He knew full well that his son would only be tortured. So angry was he that he had the beard of the Ottoman ambassador cut off and sent to Turkey, an outrageous insult.

Mention of this period would be incomplete without tell of three brothers, Sir Anthony, Sir Robert, and Sir Thomas Shirley, gentlemen adventurers who did much

to assist Abbas to the place he rightly holds in history. They captured the imagination and confidence of the court at Isfahan and achieved distinction in their difficult rôle. Particularly was their military knowledge of use. They left England with no mean reputation, Sir Anthony already having achieved fame under the Earl of Essex in the Low Country and in France under Henry IV, who knighted him. He was a man of parts, although short of stature; and given to ostentation, in spite of the fact that fortune had not dowered him with wealth.

His voyage eastwards was by way of Venice, where he bought woollen and linen cloths as presents to the Shah; and via Aleppo, whence he took lengths of cloth of gold and twelve golden cups studded with emeralds and other jewels. He was advised not to say on his way through Turkey that he was going to Persia, for the Sultan and the Shah were not on speaking terms. It was a useful hint, for in those days the Turks did as they pleased. Did a Christian strike a Turk, he must either turn Moslem or lose his right arm. Sir Anthony was told that he must hire sixteen extra men to protect him from bandits. He agreed, but only one man arrived, who claimed to be the whole sixteen, because he had lately fought that number all at once, and vanquished them, and was therefore not only as good as sixteen, but worth an equivalent wage! The Turks imprisoned the eldest brother, Sir Thomas, for some fancied crime. His feet were thrust into stocks, a heavy iron chain was put about his neck, his hands were secured in front of him, and a sharp stone was pushed into the small of his back. His tormentors then applied lice. Thus he remained for many years.

Eventually Anthony and Robert reached Persia. At Kazvin they attended a grand reception and banquet given in their honour by the city governor at the royal palace, which boasted a gate sparkling with rich stones, standing at the top of seven steps, the first of which every

visitor had to kiss. Ten beautiful women danced during the feast.

To meet Shah Abbas, Sir Anthony dressed himself in a gown and a coat of gold cloth, his sword sash valued at a thousand pounds and set with pearls and diamonds. He wore a costly turban upon his head. His boots were studded with pearls and rubies. Even the interpreter was attired in cloth of silver. Four retainers were dressed in silk damask, four more in crimson velvet, four in blue damask, with "taffety" undercoats, four in yellow damask, a page in cloth of gold, and four footmen in carnation "taffety." This gorgeous cavalcade was led by the secretary, apparelled as a marshal, and carrying a white staff of office. Advancing to meet them came twelve hundred horsemen, each bearing a man's head on his lance, and wearing a necklace of human ears. Then came trumpeters and drummers, six standard bearers, and twelve pages. Alone in his glory rode Abbas, short, stocky, and swarthy, at the head of twelve thousand men. The Shirleys dismounted and embraced the royal foot. Then the Shah galloped away unattended, when Sir Anthony took his place at the head of the Persian troops, as a symbol that all the king's possessions belonged to his guests. In an hour His Majesty returned, accompanied by sixteen mounted Amazons, and embraced the Englishmen. They entered the town together over a road of satin and "taffety." To entertain his guests Abbas ordered a skirmish by the troops. Thinking the affray not hearty enough, he rushed among them himself, and laid about him with his sword, killing some, and cutting the arms off others, slicing one unfortunate in two.

The brothers found such favour with the Shah that he asked them to go as ambassadors of Persia to various European courts, to persuade Christian princes to co-operate against Turkey. Sir Anthony, equipped out of the privy purse, set forth with a Persian who later adopted

the Roman Catholic religion and the name of Don Juan. With them Abbas sent camels; sixteen mules carrying four carpets of silk and gold, and six of clean silk; fourteen horses and saddles, two being gold-plated and set with turquoise and rubies; and sixteen thousand silver ducats carried by six men. Friends accompanied them on the early stages of their journey, witnessing wrestling, camel and ram fights, and bear and bull baiting. They came to Gilan, where the two embarked, with a Franciscan and a Dominican Friar, to whom Abbas had given special letters to Rome. The Dominican mysteriously disappeared. Don Juan suspected Sir Anthony, saying he had threatened to do away with the friar when they were sailing up the River Elder. The suspicion arose because the friar said he had lent Sir Anthony a thousand crowns and had asked him to look after ninety diamonds. The knight strenuously denied the charge.

They stayed about five months at the capital of the Grand Duke of the Muscovites, and three more at the Imperial Court of Prague, before going on to kiss the foot of His Holiness the Pope. The Persian Ambassador accused Sir Anthony (it seems rightly) of selling the presents intended for the Pope, instead of sending them to Rome aboard a British ship as he had promised.

Anthony left Robert in Persia to command the Shah's armies against the Turks. Robert set a courageous example to the troops, rushing into battle with a pole-axe, so the Persians presented him with a crown of laurels. He was wounded three times by the Turks and became known as the "famous English Persian." About 1608 Abbas sent him as ambassador to Europe. James I received him at court, and he returned to Isfahan seven years later. He left again almost immediately on a similar errand, arriving in England wearing Persian clothes, his letters of credence written in Persian characters, but this time the East India Company said he was working more in the

interests of Persia than in those of England. He died suddenly of apoplexy, about 1620, three months after his return to Persia, and was buried at the door of his own house at Kazvin.

Abbas performed many pilgrimages as an example to his people. On one occasion he walked the whole eight hundred miles to the tomb of the Imam Riza at Meshed. He also visited the shrine of Ali at Najaf. On the other side of his character we have the licence and indulgence common to eastern potentates of that time. Vicious and brutal though he was, he accomplished big things, and although he murdered his sons, it was largely because there were many people anxious and willing to use them as tools to encompass his end. At his instigation his eldest son, a vigorous and able leader, was stabbed. Another died. The third, who had just returned from the wars covered with glory and popularity, had his eyes put out. Driven mad, the youth murdered his sister, whom Abbas worshipped. The fourth and last son was blinded.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, besides fostering culture and architecture, widely encouraged arts and crafts. Strong rule and the suppression of lawlessness gave the land a somewhat bloody peace which enabled those with the mind, or the necessity, to work.

Abbas died when he was seventy, after a glorious reign of forty-two years. On the whole he had been a good ruler, quashing brigandage and encouraging industry. His epitaph ran: "When this great prince ceased to live, Persia ceased to prosper." During four more reigns the country remained quiet in the shade of his greatness.

His successor, Shah Sufi, was weak and vicious. Not content with murdering all the princes and princesses he could lay hands on, he slew advisers and generals wholesale; and their sons lest they sought revenge.

After him came Abbas the Second, then Suleiman and Sultan Husein, all unfitted for the rank they held. Husein,

if anything, was the weakest of the four. Believing a false report that his vizier was seeking to murder him, he had him blinded. In his panic he dismissed the commander-in-chief of the army, which promptly dispersed. Thus Persia was without any means of defence when the Afghans came on the scene. Calamity threatened the land.

Mahmoud had made one unsuccessful raid from Afghanistan to Persia. When he heard of the weakness at court he decided upon a second attempt. Husein tried to buy him off, outside the gates of Isfahan, for thirty thousand pounds. Mahmoud laughed and pressed on. The Isfahani rabble would not hear of a policy of wait and see. They sought immediate victory, but after trifling losses they fled. They had no stomach for war, and could not defend even their own homes. Happily for them, Mahmoud did not pursue them. Allowing time for loot and for the enemy to retreat with their guns, he was preparing to retrace his steps when a spy told him that the city was in an uproar. The Armenian suburb of Julfa soon capitulated, deserted by those from whom she had every right to expect help. The price of Armenian safety was a hundred and thirty thousand pounds and fifty virgins.

Mahmoud next besieged the city of Isfahan. In July, a twelve-pound loaf of bread sold within the walls fetched ten crowns, in August thirty crowns, and in October two hundred. A dead horse—and even the Shah was forced to eat horseflesh—cost about fifteen thousand crowns. The wretched people dragged their pitiful bodies about the streets in quest of carcasses, or attacked their fellows in a frenzy of hunger, falling upon the dead for food. “Even tender mothers spared not their own children; but deaf to all their cries and tears, became first their butchers and then cut them up and eat them.” The siege continued for two and a half months, the rotting remains of the dead polluting the river and tainting the fish. Finally,

Husein sent to Mahmoud his loveliest daughter, bearing many rich presents. He dressed himself in his most gorgeous robes, and, with three hundred nobles similarly arrayed, sallied forth. Although Mahmoud received him coldly and with scant ceremony, the Shah greeted him affectionately as his son-in-law, removing his own crown and placing it upon Mahmoud's head, requesting only that he would not touch the royal concubines; and that he would not kill, but would cherish the princes of the blood.

Two days later the victor entered Isfahan. First came ten infantrymen; then James Curland, an English general, mounted upon a richly caparisoned horse, and carrying the keys of city and palace; then a hundred and fifty Prætorians of the Guard, swords drawn; followed by thirty mounted officers forming a circle. In the midst of them rode the new Shah in full regalia, sceptre in hand, and flanked by two generals who supported a canopy so strewn with diamonds and other precious stones that it dazzled the eyes of the spectators. Behind rode a hundred of the Royal Bodyguard, followed somewhat ignominiously by the ex-king and his nobles. Troops lined the streets, stopping at intervals to burn sweet-smelling incense to offset the stench of putrefying flesh. Capitulation was complete.

Some months later Mahmoud sent ten thousand troops to Kazvin, where their harsh cruelty caused the people to revolt with such success that but few of the oppressors straggled back to Isfahan. In revenge, and to maintain his prestige, Mahmoud invited three hundred grandees to a feast, where he murdered them and their children. Slaughtering all his Persian soldiers, he ordered a general massacre of those who had been loyal to Husein. Julfa had to pay the price of more high-born Armenian girls.

One by one, cities plucked up courage to revolt against his cruel hand. He withdrew into solitude for religious exercises. At last his brain failed, and he laid about him

with a sword, slaying all the royal princes. He became stricken with leprosy, "his flesh, parting by degrees from the Bone, peel'd off in Flakes. In the Height of his Phrenzy he would tear his Hands and Arms with his Teeth."

The court nobles put their heads together and decided to liberate Mahmoud's cousin, Acheraf, and to offer him the throne. His first wise act was to behead Mahmoud. He ruled strongly. Cunning, he pretended to offer the crown to Husein or to his absentee son Tahmasp. Husein refused for himself, and would not answer for Tahmasp, who advanced with a large army to Teheran, where Acheraf hoped to confine him, but Tahmasp avoided the issue. Enraged, Acheraf sacked the city and slew man, woman, and child, ravishing Qum and Sava on his way back to Isfahan.

Meanwhile Persia's neighbours had not been idle. Turkey and Russia seized their opportunities and advanced. Acheraf was obliged to sue for peace in 1725, leaving the whole of western Persia in the hands of the Turks. Meanwhile Tahmasp had been joined by five thousand Kurds and Afshars, under Nadir Kuli, the Slave of the Wonderful, who was destined to achieve fame as a great Asiatic conqueror. Seizing Khorassan they finally put Acheraf to flight, but not before he had murdered Husein.

CHAPTER XVIII

CUT AND DEAL

NADIR began his life making sheepskin coats and tending goats. When he was eighteen he and his mother were carried off in a raid. She died. He escaped, taking service with the Governor of Abivard and marrying his master's daughter. Succeeding his father-in-law, he warred against his original captors. Successful, he demanded to be made Governor of Khorassan. Instead he was beaten and dismissed, so he turned brigand and captured Nisapur. He offered Shah Tahmasp the help of his army, and together they took Meshed and defeated the Afghans, who fled, leaving the corpses of old men, children, and animals to mark their route. Wisely refusing the title of Sultan of four provinces, Nadir imprisoned Tahmasp and proclaimed himself regent over a princeling who soon died. He then set about the business of usurping the throne for himself, giving a banquet to all the nobles, and making a speech wherein he said: "Shah Tahmasp and Shah Abbas were great kings. Choose one of their descendants as your King, *or some other virtuous man.*" He then withdrew. The nobles had no other course but to choose him. He daily refused for a month, saying it was sufficient for him that he had restored glory to Persia and freed her from the Afghans, the Turks, and the Russians. At last he accepted.

He went from strength to strength, attacked the Afghans, captured Delhi, and returned with fifty millions' worth of spoil, including the famous Peacock Throne. His battle-

cry was so loud and inspiring that it had the effect of heartening his own troops and of striking terror into the breasts of the enemy. His empire stretched from the Indus to the Caucasus. His travelling tent was of red cloth lined with violet satin, ornamented with every conceivable bird and animal, and studded with precious stones. The throne, secluded behind two screens embroidered in diamonds, and representing two angels, needed seven elephants to transport it. Many of the jewels came from the treasure chest of the Delhi Moghuls. About twelve years after he ascended the throne he was assassinated. His son tore out the murderer's eyes, and handed him over to the dead Shah's harem.

Persian might declined in civil war.

The next three Shahs were blinded by usurpers. Things went from bad to worse. In 1750 the chief of an aboriginal tribe announced himself regent, and ruled most of Persia, making Shiraz his capital. After his death, rulers came and went.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Agha Muhammad Shah founded the Kojar Dynasty, which persisted until Riza Pahlevi came on the scene. Agha Muhammad chose Teheran as his capital, although in barren country, because it adjoined that of his own tribe, the Kojars. Old-fashioned historians licked their lips over him, saying that "he waded through seas of blood to reach his throne." He at once seized and tortured the deposed heir. He had one of his own brothers blinded and another murdered. To punish a rising at Kerman he levied a toll of so many sacks of human eyes, involving over thirty thousand people. The eyes were cast on the ground before him that he might count them with the point of his sword, saying to his minister:

"It is well. Had any been missing, yours would have made up the number."

He handed thousands of Kermani women to his soldiers.

The city was left sightless and in bondage. His rule was one long record of brutality. Castrated when he was five years old, it would seem that he sought a torrent of revenge. Known as the Eunuch Shah, he selected the wealthy and aged Shah Rukh for his immediate attentions. As the tortures were applied the old man gave way, and, in his dying moment, revealed the prize for which Agha Muhammad had been working, the hiding-place of his gold. Avaricious beyond belief, this Shah would sell victims to their enemies, that the last farthing might be extracted from them by the latest methods of the day. He had the bones of Nadir and his sons taken to Teheran where they were reburied beneath a threshold, that they might be desecrated by being trodden upon. He blinded those who dared to stare at his ugly face. He himself was murdered by two condemned servants, whom he foolishly allowed to remain in attendance on him, and was succeeded by his famous nephew, Feth Ali Shah, who rode post haste from Fars and successfully set aside other claimants to the throne.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Europe was aflame under the spell of Napoleon. England's power was in the ascendant, although France did all she could to undermine our interests in the East. In 1800 Lord Wellesley, the Governor-General of India, sent Captain John Malcolm to Persia to make a treaty of amity. Then came news of Persia's treaty with the French, whereat an expedition of ten thousand men was prepared in Bombay. Persia began to arm her frontiers, thought better of it, and sent to India offering to expel the French mission.

Robert Ravell made a painting of Feth Ali Shah, showing him with dark, lively eyes set in a pale, almost transparent face. He was seated upon a richly carved and bejewelled throne, at his back an embroidered cushion. Upon his head was a magnificent crown. His vestments were loaded with jewels, including the Mountain of Light and the Sea of Splendour, which flashed so that the Threshold of the

World's Glory dazzled the eyes of all beholders. His beard, silky and black, the admiration and delight of his people, fell to his waist. All around him stood courtiers, placed according to rank; warriors with daggers, civilians with a pen-case or a roll of paper. Nine sons flanked their father. Six Europeans stood on the right, then the Turkish, Arabian, and Indian envoys. All the hundred and eighteen figures in the picture were portraits. Even the Europeans had doffed their slippers and boots. All wore head-dresses.

A state procession in those days usually consisted of a gorgeously trapped elephant; fifty camels, upon which rode musicians playing long trumpets and kettledrums; five hundred more draped with flags and carrying small cannon; a battery of eighteen guns; twenty splendidly decked horses; forty running footmen, their caps shaped like crowns and bearing vari-coloured plumes; then the Shah, his charger's saddlery studded with diamonds. After an interval of a hundred yards followed the royal princes, at the head of about fifteen thousand cavalry. When the Shah arrived at his destination, a camel was slaughtered, five hundred guns were fired as a salute, and the head of the camel was then brought and laid at the Feet of Splendour, who advanced to the throne to receive more salutations amid a salvo of firing.

Feth Ali made a beautiful marble bath for the ladies of his harem, which they entered down a marble chute. At the bottom stood their Lord and Master, waiting to catch them. He had sixty-five sons and about an equal number of daughters.

A miser, he grudged money spent on the defence of his kingdom. His sons waged his wars without conspicuous success. The eldest was asked by the vizier what he would do when he became Shah. He replied frankly that he would kill the vizier—who saw to it that the brother, Abbas Mirza, was proclaimed crown prince.

As Cyrus plotted that Cambyzes was to succeed him, so did Feth Ali Shah appoint Abbas as his successor.

Abbas, who had command of the army against the Russians, sold much of the domain over which he ruled, for favour of support in the accession, having disgracefully handled the military campaign, and agreed to an unnecessary treaty for personal reward. Later he sought to regain the confidence he had lost, and gathered a large army, which was well organized, used English muskets, and made cannon and powder in an arsenal at Tabriz. The cavalry had English sabres. Abbas was the best of a bad lot, but he died before his father at the age of forty-three.

At that time it was easy to collect an army to fight the Russians. They were a long way off.

A Russian officer was chaffing a Persian about the ways of the country, contrasting them with European customs. At last the Persian could stand it no longer.

"Why do you, a Russian," he said, "talk about Europe as though you were a European? You may wear a hat and a coat and trousers cut after the latest Parisian fashion, and think yourself a Feringhee, but everyone knows that you and your countrymen are but the descendants of the riff-raff of the Moghul."

The soldiers were allowed to plunder anything they could find, for they had no regular pay, food, or clothes, and were only kept in order by threat of the bastinado.

After a weak reign of thirty-seven years, Feth Ali died. About that time British Military Missions were the backbone of Persian policy. The difficulties of those days were accentuated by Russian intrigue. Shahs continued to be vague and helpless. The result was constant internal strife.

The Aga Khan, a descendant of the Ismailis, upon whose creed the Assassins were founded, rebelled. Successful at first, he afterwards fled to India where he helped the British in Sind.

Great Britain's policy in Persia depended upon the settlement of the troubles arising from the Afghan War. Her rôle was to hinder Persian supplies to the Russian forces striking towards India, in a country which distrusted her intentions but not her means of enforcing them. The Russian minister had considerable influence with the Shah and used gold and threats to gain his points. England had begun to regard Afghanistan and Persia as buffer states against Russia, and thus sought to remain in the good graces of the Shah, hoping that she would be able to press Persia to restrict supplies to the Russians. Persia was then well in the international soup, stirred by Britain and Russia at the same time.

For half a century the same influences applied. Only the detail varied. Shahs remained as weak as the country over which they ruled. Policies vacillated. Great nations sought their own ends in the chaos of a hopeless government with a still more hopeless outlook. The people had no control over their rulers, were down-trodden and abused in every conceivable way, and grew desperate for want of leadership.

An attempt to achieve reform was made in the summer of 1906, when over ten thousand people, under priestly influence, marched to the British Legation and took sanctuary. They settled themselves near the Union Jack and indulged in passive resistance, until the Shah dismissed one of the more flagrant bullies and promised some form of constitution. It was a bloodless revolution. When the Shah died a year later, the country was relieved of a despot, only to find his successor was a coward and a vice-riding tyrant of the worst order, with no vestige of feeling for those over whom fate had given him power.

They were hard days, when only strong measures gained redress or stopped rioting. On one occasion the women were goaded to force their way into the presence of their rulers, where they produced revolvers, tore off their

veils, and threatened to shoot themselves if nobody attended to their demands. But Persian politics have long borne a resemblance to comic opera. The prospects of her millions were ever dependent upon the whims of a ruling class, who took care that few ordinary mortals should aspire to their divine prerogative.

The Great War gave no relief. For a time Great Britain and Russia were one, their strength and importunity fourfold in consequence. In 1918 Dunsterforce, with scant respect, marched through Persia in an attempt to bolster the remnants of the Russian army. The last fifty years saw the cards spread anyhow across the table. A new deal was imperative if the game was to go on, even as a game.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MASTER OF DESTINIES

HISTORY shows that throughout twenty-five centuries, whenever Persia was in greatest need, one of her sons arose to deliver her from oppression and from the rapacity and greed of insatiable rulers. Such a one is Riza Pahlevi, who began as a trooper guarding a foreign legation in Teheran. By sheer ability he had risen to be a colonel of cavalry when Dunsterforce passed on the way to the Caucasus in 1918.

The *coup d'état* was organized by one Seyd Zia-ed-Din el Tabatabai, a remarkable dreamer of about thirty. He knew that the Cossacks at Kazvin were to relieve troops which had been corrupted by the pleasures and latitude of the metropolis. Instead of a small force, more than two thousand marched on Teheran. At their head rode Riza. Seyd Zia met him at the city gates. Then and there they publicly declared their intention of supplanting those who were exploiting the country from personal motives. The Shah and his court feared a Bolshevist movement, so to some extent they were relieved when the revolutionary party declared that they sought to oppose Bolshevism. Nevertheless, the troops in Teheran were ordered to contest their entrance, but as soon as they saw the strength and purpose of the Cossacks, they joined them, seizing police headquarters and displaying marked military enthusiasm.

Colonel Riza Khan was soon appointed commander-in-chief with the title of Sirdar Sipah. Then he became Minister for War, gradually ousting the less practical

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Seyd Zia. Riza's strong and dominant personality saw to it that the bulk of the country's revenue went to develop the army. It was a short step to make himself master. Adept at political intrigue, despite many vicissitudes he cleared his path of all who might stay his hand, and gripped the cabinet by force of character. The reigning Shah, disgraced by a shocking record of weak rule, was sent packing to Europe, where he promptly died. Control of the cabinet, then power absolute, enabled Riza to found a new dynasty. A soldier and a statesman, he showed the Eastern flair for despotism. A mock election decided who was to be the new Shah. Riza was a strong favourite for a race in which there was only one horse.

Thousands flocked to his coronation in April, 1926, which was held in the great hall of the famous Gulistan Palace in Teheran. The tall pearl-encrusted crown of the former dynasty lay upon a cushion beside the Darya-i-Nur, smaller sister to the Koh-i-Nur. He wore a cape sewn with pearls. The Prime Minister advanced bearing the golden Pahlevi crown, made especially for the occasion, richly bejewelled with diamonds, emeralds, and rubies, a fine egret in the centre. Riza placed it upon his own head. Seated on the throne of Nadir Shah he made a speech, in the course of which he said: "The officials of the Government must display faithfulness and probity, energy and activity. They must endeavour to make the people wise, strong, and powerful; and must provide for the comfort of the public according to my expectations." After the ceremony he drove in state through Teheran in his golden coach.

When does such conduct become tolerable?

"Treason doth never prosper; what's the reason?
For if it prosper, none dare call it treason."

Until his accession the wretched peasants were forced to pay heavy taxes without prospect of redress. They were

the unprotected prey of bandits, and, worse than that, of the government officials themselves. Even travellers from foreign countries had to pay tribute to the tribes through whose territory they passed.

"Only the hand that grasps the sword can wield the sceptre," was Rumi's comment when we asked him about the Pahlevi rule.

Riza's obvious purpose, the simple manner of his life, and his industry upon the country's behalf gradually instilled into the people the security so shamefully discredited in the immediate, aye, and in the distant past. He gave them what for long they had lacked—a man. He is not easily thwarted. No one as yet has seriously threatened his authority. Nevertheless his task has not been straightforward. Several of his advisers, strong in their strength, unhappily died. The feared Teymourtashe did not recover from an operation. A chief of police committed suicide. Other valued adherents succumbed to mysterious maladies, leaving Riza unquestioned arbiter upon everything; although bereft, by a series of unfortunate circumstances, of the services of many of the country's most capable men.

"There was once a plot to assassinate the Asylum of the Universe," said Rumi, "at a meeting of racehorses. It fell upon the Divine ears. Ten minutes before the appointed moment, His Imperial Highness summoned the ambitious ones to stand before him, his only armour a lashing whip, with which he crossed their faces, each blow more deserved than the one which had the honour to precede it. His success is as you see it. The security of our country belongs to him. He has fashioned our police and our soldiery, who for the first time are given the wherewithal to live. He manages his people by spectacular moving."

Before Riza's advent Persia was overrun by nomads. He broke the strength of the tribes, forcibly removed their arms, and saw to it that they were not unduly

burdened; yet that they suffered pressing encouragement to cease lawlessness and to engage in honest toil. The means he used to smash tribal strength were unorthodox, to say the least of it. He summoned several sheikhs to Teheran, the right ones at the right time, to discuss the law and order of their domains. Where he had reason to doubt the loyalty of any sheikh, that sheikh was not allowed to return, but became a permanent guest of the state, lucky not to follow, upon their last journey, some of his less fortunate colleagues from whom special information had been necessary. Report says that when Riza considered it in the interests of Iran that a tribe be humbled, he sent police, armed with the authority of the tribal sheikh himself, previously induced by arts of persuasion unpractised in more civilized countries, to sign on the dotted line.

He had some difficulty with the Lurs, cousins of the warlike Bakhtiari. At his command the Governor of Luristan invited twelve leaders to a conference. On their arrival he hanged them in a row. Goaded to fury, the Lurs proceeded to boil alive all the state officials they could lay hands upon, and continued to rebel against the stern new smuggling edicts. Thereupon Riza bought all their donkeys and mules at about a quarter of the market value, thus depriving them of their means of transport, and making it unprofitable to replace their loss from across the border.

A king can do no wrong. By the same token he must do no wrong. Not for three hundred years has Iran been so contented, prosperous, and safe as under Riza Shah Pahlevi. Apart from rapid progress, he is restoring historic ruins, and is reputed to be building a luxurious palace of alabaster polished on both sides to give exotic transparency. Thus perhaps he hopes to outbid the past, that generations yet unborn shall cede him pride of place, above even Abbas the Great. The Shah of Persia has ever been likened to the Ornament in the Cheek of the Eternal Empire. Riza

is no exception. An Iranian of pure descent, he was born at Firouz, of the stock of the Savadhouhs of Mazanderan, a district renowned for purity of breeding and for bravery. Both his father and his grandfather were soldiers, his father being killed during the Afghan War. He means to rule as an Eastern potentate is expected to rule. Is he not the Imperial Dictator, the Lord of the Revolutions of the World? His strength lies in an ability to weld the people together, giving them new life and a new outlook. His achievement ranks the higher when one thinks of the religious and tribal difficulties he had to face. International problems with Russia and the vested interests of other great powers point the wisdom in his diplomacy.

Rumi was the soul of discretion.

"Poor is the friendless Master of the World," was his way of saying how uneasy lies a Shah's head. "Yet I, who am less than the dust of the earth, would be his sacrifice." Turning to the D.P. he continued, "When will His Majesty have Your Excellency's brightness before the Supreme Presence?"

Eleven o'clock on the morrow was the appointed hour of audience. Rumi accompanied us. We saw a fine-looking man, over six feet tall, wearing a plain undress uniform of baratheia, smock gripped by a simple leather belt, slacks with a broad red stripe down each side, and elastic-sided Wellingtons. He looked a soldier. His hair was grey and close-cropped, his well-marked brows and brown eyes emphasized a prominent aquiline nose and a white moustache. Long fingers played with amber beads. A deep voice discussed world affairs with interest and intelligence, expressing friendship for Great Britain, and delighting to welcome Englishmen. His vision and practical outlook upon the problems of life combined with a fierce determination that his will be done.

Rumi was full of the audience.

"Sir P.'s breath of yesterday was rank with expecta-

tion. His breath of to-day is perfumed with favour. He has smoked the pipe of condescension from the mouth of the Master of Destiny."

We switched to the subject of dictators at large.

"A dictator wouldn't suit England," we began. "We get what we want under rule by committee. When the chairman dies, there are several vice-chairmen ready to move to the head of the table. I'll give you two examples where British diplomacy achieved its aim with a subtlety that Thäis herself might envy."

Rumi settled himself to the unaccustomed rôle of listener.

"A delegation, which included a particularly objectionable member, called upon a provincial governor. The offensive gentleman was invited privately and alone into the study, where he was kept waiting for nearly an hour before his host came to welcome him. That was all. A word or two of good-bye, and the interview was over. When the bewildered delegate returned to his friends in the other room, they asked him what he had discussed with the governor. The reply was, of course, 'Nothing.' His suspicious colleagues retaliated with the Eastern equivalent of 'Sez you,' and thenceforth discountenanced everything he said and did. The same governor also had to deal with the opposition of a local official of known anti-British tendencies, so he invited him to talk things over. When the visitor rose to go, his car had unfortunately broken down. The governor, who said he was going in the same direction, offered him a lift. The sight of the anti-British champion driving in state with the British representative, who took care to parade the Source of Trouble along the main streets, was too much for the populace. The official resigned."

Rumi thought for a while.

"Perfidious Albion," was all he said; oblivious of the fact that the stronger but equally indirect methods natural

to the East might also be criticized. "To his own people a diplomat is a man of honour who sips the wine of truth whilst lying abroad for his country. I had the pleasure to hear your excellent Sir P. ask how the Shadow of the Almighty has been privileged to remain the Disposer of Good. That is because it has delighted Riza Shah to be moderate. The strongest cannot gain too sweeping a victory or he loses the prey upon which he feeds."

Members of the ex-royal family are allowed to live in Iran without let or hindrance, more or less in retirement, taking little part in the activities of the country. Not that intervention on their part would carry much weight. Arguments upon one proposal or another invariably return to the same statement. It is by order of the Shah.

We asked Rumi about the imposing titles beloved of all Iranians.

"Our society has always been distinguished by elaborate address," he said. "The more magnificent and the higher born the individual, the longer and more intricate the approach. You have heard me use some of the titles of the Most Lofty of Living Men. Lesser known ones were the Source of Honour, of Glory; Equal to the Sun, a Brother of the Moon and of the Stars, whose Throne is the Stirrup of Heaven; Agent of Heaven in this World; Object of the Vows of all Mortal Men." He paused for breath. "Chief of the Most Excellent Seat of the Universe; Sitting in the Seat of the First Temporal Power; the Prince of the Faithful; Born and Sprung from the Throne which is the Only Throne on Earth; First Noble of the Most Ancient Nobility; Centre of the Universe. There are many more. Enough?"

As the D.P. and ourself could boast but one rank apiece, and ours was lowly, we assured Rumi that we had enjoyed a bellyful, but he was wound up.

"The present Emperor of All Corporeal Beings has the special title of *'ala hazrat*, of saintly significance. It has

been his salubrious pleasure to declare other titles to be a waste of time. Therefore he has abolished them. Ministers and diplomats retain the address of *jinab*, meaning Excellence. Those more abased are called *agha*. To wrest the horns of the situation from its dilemma, *shuma*, 'you' in Persian, which for long went a-begging, has returned to the house of our use."

CHAPTER XX

LAND OF THE LION AND THE SUN

“‘No part of the world can afford anything more magnificent and rich or more splendid and bright,’ wrote your Sir Chardin, of Persia,” said Rumi. “He was right.”

Under the Achæmenid, Sassanian, and Safavid dynasties the Persian empire extended across Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and the Caucasus, Turkistan, Afghanistan, and Northern India. Despite vicissitudes, even to-day she is nearly three times the size of France. In a nation—and Persia has remained a nation for over two millennia—where a third of the population, or about four million people, are nomad, it is not surprising that, as the errant mother said when she scrutinized her children, “they’re a queer mixture.” Some of the people are a hotch-potch of Arab, Guebre, and Jew. The Lurs embrace the Bakhtiari, who may be remotely connected with the Kurds, but will not admit it, calling them Leks. The Lurs contend that they are not of Persian origin, but are descended from the great Aryan race of Asia.

“Give a Lur some sour milk, a handful of chestnuts, a gun, and some ammunition, and he will fight anyone for as long as you like,” commented Rumi. “The Bakhtiari, the Feili Lurs, and the Mamassounis are probably of a savage stock which existed in Alexander’s time; hill people, fierce of temper, and far removed from the forces of all but local government. The Bakhtiari claim that they alone in all Iran withstood the Medes and Persians, and even the Macedonians. While acknowledging the authority

of the Shah, he is so far away that they remain a power in their distance, with their own code of laws and their own customs.

"One of their maxims is," said Rumi, "'Though my elder brother smite me on the mouth, yet must I bear his rifle in war, and die on his left hand.' Away in Luristan, they present a united front to outsiders, although incessantly squabbling among themselves—which probably keeps them fighting fit."

They migrate in search of grass for their flocks and herds, to the Yellow Mountain, twelve thousand feet of black and yellow rock stretching to perennial snow and mist. When on trek into the mountains they leave their goatskin tents behind. Until they reach the higher slopes, they move before daybreak, camping again before sunrise. The Kurds on the border of 'Iraq form a strong link physically as well as politically.

"The wilderness is theirs with all its caves,
Its hollow glens, its thickets, and its plains;
Unvisited by man, there they are free.
Woe to the tyrant if he dare intrude
Within the confines of their wild domain."

Some hold Kurdistan to be ancient Chaldea, and say that the Kurds harassed the retreat of the ten thousand. We asked Rumi about them.

"Set a Kurd to catch a Kurd," he said. "A Kurd's hand is against every man, and every man's hand is against a Kurd. They have always been bountifully clad and mounted. At one time their warriors wore coats of mail and carried lances, pistols, and a small brass-studded shield. Upon their helmets they bore dressed plumes, one for every man they had killed, and the same upon their horses."

We gathered he was not over-fond of them. But to us, their swarthy fierce features, their daggers, rifles, huge

bandoliers, and gaudy clothes were a relief, for they were untouched by Western influence.

"The idea that we are a homogeneous race is ridiculous," said Rumi. "A large proportion of the people in the north above Hamadan and Teheran are of Turanian descent. Turkish influence is widespread. The Qashgai tribe near Shiraz, led, until the advent of Riza Shah, by the famous Saulat-ud-Daulah, have Turkish antecedents. They are warlike, and proud of mien. The Turkomans claim to derive their name from Turk-mamend, or Turk-like, and were possibly Tartars, for Tartary was called Turkistan by the ancients, although the modern name for the same region is Turan. The Tartars still wear a sandal cross-strapped to the knee, to support the muscles of the calf when hill-climbing. I have heard that your Scottish peasants do the same, do they not?"

We remembered learning from an old crofter in our boyhood days that the plaid stockings knitted by his wife followed spiral lines in imitation of the strappings worn by her forbears.

"But the Turkomans," continued Rumi, "who were famed for their horses, are more likely descended from the great monarch Moghul Khan. His grandson had five sons, and bequeathed to them a bow and three golden arrows; dividing the bow, emblem of power, between the two eldest, to whom he entrusted his empire; and to the three others an arrow each, signifying that they were to fly swift and unquestioning as an arrow from the bow at the command of their elder brothers."

The Shamloo and Affshar, long settled in Persia, are other tribes of Turkish descent. Nadir Shah was an Affshar.

"The Turks in Persia," said Rumi, "have built unto themselves a tottering castle of reputation. In Georgia they say that he who trusts a Turk leans on a wave—a swell more likely. Even the Turks themselves have a

proverb that a Laz, who is a low Turk, will knife a man for an onion. Our royal family used Turkish, the language of diplomacy, although among themselves they spoke pure Persian, which your Sir Jones believed the original of Syriac or Chaldean, the base of Sanscrit, Zend, and Parsi, and of much Greek, Latin, and the Gothic tongues. Avestic is the ancient language of the Zoroastrian sacred books. The Archæmenid kings used Old Persian for stone inscriptions, usually side by side with Elamitic and Babylonian parallels, as you saw upon the carvings at Bisitun. Urdu is a mixture of Persian and Hindi."

We found the language difficulty proverbial. With so many races, and with so little education during past centuries, whoever may seek to weld Iranians together will not succeed until they all speak a common tongue.

The influence of Persian on English is interesting. Hocus pocus comes from the Persian *hokopaz*, a conjurer. Van is an abbreviation of *caravan*, popularly corrupted to carry-van. Bazaar, shawl, sash, awning, turquoise, and taffetas are all words of Persian origin; as are orange, lemon, melon, and peach. Spinach is Persian. So is julep, from *gulab* or rose; hazard, from *hazar*, a chance in a thousand. Even Paradise comes to us through Persia, from the Greek. The *bhisti*, the Indian water-carrier, gets his name from the Persian word meaning "an inhabitant of Paradise," a place filled in the minds of the ancients with a thousand streams.

Persians have always been arrogant and will not credit that there could be countries finer than their own. They hold that everything was created for the personal satisfaction of the Shah, who used to speak of himself in the third person. His strongest oath was "by the Head of the King," or "by the Soul of the King." He could do no wrong. The women of his country unveiled at his command.

"Upon ceremonial occasions, and in state processions, the Shah wore a diamond called the Brilliant Sea upon

his left arm, and another called the Brilliant Mountain on his left leg," elaborated Rumi. "He would show favour to an official by presenting him with a rich dress, a horse accoutred with a golden bridle and rein, or a jewelled shawl. Gradually the custom degenerated, until, when the Shah sought to ruin one of his subjects, he sent him presents. The unfortunate recipient had to return four-fold the value. Perhaps the king elected to dine with him. During the banquet royal retainers were instructed to take away everything of value and destroy all else, while the host's retainers were too busy serving the meal to guard their master's possessions. Silence at such a repast would be pregnant with speculation on the part of the unfortunate host, punctuated by a crash as a distant chandelier came down, or by screams from the harem—strange contrast to the etiquette of an ordinary ceremonial meal where all used eyes, hands, and mouths in vocal if not gastric silence, for it was rude to speak.

"A certain Persian king's brother conspired against him and was forgiven so often that the king eventually lost patience. He sent to his brother, saying that his eyes pleased him greatly.

"Take them," said the brother, who had his eyes cut out and served to the king on a golden plate.

"A rebel surrendered to another king on condition that his blood was not spilt, so the king bricked him up alive in Teheran, where he died of hunger, after eating his own hands."

Rumi told us that Agha Muhammad Shah desired to possess the Indian jewels left by Nadir Shah to his blind son, Shah Rukh, the ruler of Khorassan. To force the blind man to disclose their hiding-place, a crown of paste was placed upon his head. Into it was poured molten lead. Persian kings often witnessed the execution of the sentence of torture they passed, such as the victim being suspended upside down and sawn in half. Little princesses

would be blinded before they reached the age of puberty, lest they bore another claimant to the throne, all possible aspirants to which were wont to be thrust away.

"Kings are like fire," said Rumi, "which warms those who remain at a certain distance, but consumes all who approach too close.

"Once a noble angered Shah Abbas, so he had him tied to a stake, that other gentlemen might throw a hundred quinces at him. Another foolishly angered the Shah who ordered his tongue to be cut off, then his eyelids, the crown of his head, his lips, his nose, and, last of all, his hamstrings. The victim was condemned to lie thus until he died."

One Shah, an adept at tilting with the reed spear, and a fine marksman with a bow and arrow, would lay a heavy wager with wealthy friends to shoot at a mark or a sheep. Should he miss, a servant made a hole in the mark or pulled the sheep down by a cord. The royal prerogative was clearly unbeatable. They were stern, unrelenting days, when whimsical monarchs ruled, save the word, solely for their own delight. Reared from birth in an atmosphere of war and violence, what could be expected of those who had, in their young lives, already witnessed a myriad cruel acts? They maintained armies as best they could, largely to protect the royal person, and to threaten the more unruly elements. Every tribe sent its quota to the king's bodyguard, held as hostage for good behaviour. The lot of the soldiers themselves, apart from the wide licence afforded them when they marched against defenceless villages, was questionable. Rumi told us of a Persian prince who showed an English guest a body of troops.

"Has the king of England men such as these?" he asked.

Unwilling either to offend or to tell a lie, the Englishman hesitated.

"I'm sure he hasn't," continued the prince, "for they have been neither paid nor rationed for nearly two years."

Deserters were beaten over the mouth with a large stick, until their teeth were knocked in. Their beards were cut off, a great disgrace. Their hands were tied behind them, and the bastinado was applied, first under a stick, then under thongs, until nails and even toes dropped off. The fingers were disabled, and the wretched victims were dragged by a rope up a stony mountain and left until the next day, when they were mercifully executed.

Rumi told us a story of a Shah who visited England and was bidden to luncheon with Queen Victoria. Coffee, served in the drawing-room, was hot. The Shah, without a second thought, poured it into the saucer. To put him at his ease the Queen did the same, followed by all the other guests. The same Shah visited a prison, where he was entranced by the hangman's shed, and asked the Governor to demonstrate upon a warder how it worked. When the Governor refused, the Shah shrugged his shoulders, and turned to one of his staff, commanding him to oblige. With difficulty was he dissuaded from pressing the point!

"State feasts," said Rumi, "were followed by music, during which the guests settled their enormous meal. We Persians enjoy music for quite different reasons from your Western conception. The music of the West is intended to break the silence. That of the East prepares us for the pause that follows. Sound is to emphasize silence, during which the listener is revealed unto himself. The complete harmony of peace is music without a note."

We were fortunate enough to attend an official banquet; an ordinary dinner, only there was too much of it. Course followed course, pressed upon us by our host until we dared not refuse. With great aplomb, he produced some special champagne. We thought it wore an odd look. It certainly tasted queer. It transpired that coolies unloading the ship had pierced the corks with red-hot wire,

drunk the champagne, and refilled the bottles with muddy water!

"A Portuguese Ambassador," murmured Rumi in our ear, "once remarked that although Persians seldom gave you ill language, they never did you any good. When a Shah died, the fact was never made public until his successor had been crowned. The body was then prepared for one of three state coffins, which were despatched to Qum, Ardebil, and Meshed. In order to guard against adverse enchantments being woven, no one was told in which coffin the king lay. When a prince of the blood entered a town, his path would be strewn with rose leaves. Glass jars filled with sugar were broken beneath the horse's hoofs, symbolizing prosperity. This must have been a common occurrence, for it used to be said of our country that you were always sure of three things: camels, fleas, and princes!"

Sacrifices were offered when distinguished travellers approached each town. A cow was slaughtered, the head being carried across the road to leave a trail of blood, that it might receive the misfortunes and disasters which Satan intended for the visitor. So precarious were journeys until quite recently, that travellers wore rags to protect them against robbers, although those rags as often as not concealed hundreds of golden ducats. Indeed, so proverbial was the wealth of Persia that the Japanese had a saying that inappropriate things were for a doctor to fall ill, for a schoolmaster not to recognize an idiom, and for a Persian to be poor.

Public and private servants wore silk or cloth tunics, lamb's-wool caps, and silk sashes. In front of a man of consequence, nine grooms led nine horses in splendid and gorgeous trappings, saddles and bridles ornamented with gold and silver. Then came eight running footmen in yellow tunics trimmed with silver, followed by the gentleman and his suite. An escort of cavalry with kettle-drums

and trumpets accompanied by secretaries and attendants and, of course, the usual pipe preparers, brought up the rear.

A traveller at the beginning of the eighteenth century has left a somewhat jaundiced view of the usual temper of the court:

"The courtiers affect a very extraordinary civility, and an engaging freedom, but then the tongue and the heart never travel together. They entirely give themselves up to sensuality and pleasures; their habits, their equipages are magnificent, and they are so excessively fond of money, that there is nothing to be obtained of them but by big bribes and presents. For the rest they are very affable and seem to be very good natured; but their behaviour is quite low and mean to those of whom they expect any favour, and they mortally hate those that cross them in what they solicit, or sue for what they want; and these they use with a degree of barbarity quite inhuman, when it happens they have an advantage over them; they slip no opportunity of hurting them, and have the art of giving a bad turn to the qualities for which they are most valuable; in a word, they can never rest until they have destroyed them. On the other hand they are the most abject flatterers of those who are in the good graces of fortune, and in great employs, and attribute to them all the perfections they can possibly think of; but these even are no sooner fallen into disgrace, than they insult over their misfortunes, and most shamefully abuse those, who in the days of their prosperity they were wont to lift up to the skies; and to these thus fallen it often happens that those who stand deepest in debt to them for favours, are the very first to tear them to pieces."

Rumi told us that in winter the men wore thick woollen socks, and over them, bandages and green slippers with a high heel, or flat red or yellow leather slippers, or a stout felt up-toed shoe of thick quilted cotton, or a Russian boot,

or short tight side-buttoning boots. To be struck with a shoe was great ignominy, for a shoe was considered vile, and was not allowed in sacred and respected places. Dress in Persia about the eighteenth century was picturesque if bulky. An ordinary citizen would wear a pair of very wide trousers tied with a string, reaching below the ankle; a silk shirt to just below the hips, and fastened with a couple of buttons on the right shoulder; a tight quilted cotton chintz vest, tied at one side and worn to the calf, with long sleeves open from the elbow down; a vest to the ankle, buttoning at the side; an outer cloth coat, when it was cold, and a shawl sash, about eight yards long and a yard broad, in which was thrust a dagger. Then came a fur-trimmed coat of cloth of gold and brocade, and, over all, a *poshteen*. The cap was eighteen inches high, made of astrakhan, and quite plain, save that the king and his sons and a few high nobles wound shawls around them.

Iranians seldom shave themselves. Barbers are more numerous than policemen, and are eager to oblige all and sundry. Even high officials sit upon the bare ground outside any squalid hovel, to submit to the tender mercies of the public razor.

"It was no uncommon thing," said Rumi, "for a man, finding that his morning ablutions had to be performed in ice-cold water, to take a mouthful, warm it within his cheeks for some moments, then squirt it over his hands; after which he used it to wash his face."

Sport was not solely a royal prerogative, for until comparatively recently large white foxes, wolves, antelopes, wild boars, lions, leopards, cheetahs, hyenas, lynxes, and jackals roamed at large over the plains and mountains. Bears and ibex abounded in the north. Five years ago a bear and its cub strayed into the 'Iraqi desert to within a few miles of Baghdad. The people hunted quails by sticking two sticks in a girdle and draping them with material to look like horns. Thus adorned they would

creep up to the quails and net them. Horse-races were seldom for less than fifteen miles. Persians played tennis and dice and backgammon. They used playing-cards made of wood, or of a composition, ninety in number and painted in eight colours. They would wrap each card in the pack separately, so as not to scratch the back, which might afford means of identification to the opponent.

Life was sociable, to say the least of it. Cattle were housed at night to prevent theft. To warm the room a large jar was sunk into the floor, filled with cakes of dung, lit, and enclosed in a wooden frame. Round this sat the family. The contraption was then covered with a quilt, beneath which everybody placed his or her knees, drawing the quilt up to the chin. Sometimes they would get right underneath to sleep.

"My people used to believe that the gods dwelt in sticks and stones, in rain and sun, and in storms," Rumi told us. "Their rôle was to equalize worldly goods. If any one dared to parade his good fortune, he fell into the habit of bowing before the nearest god, usually a tree, whose attention he called by rapping. Therefore do we touch wood. When the sun did not shine, my father, like many of his generation, grew frightened, saying that an enormous fish was trying to swallow the sun, and they must make a great noise to frighten the fish away. Pale yellow was the emblem of distress or sadness. We have many beautiful superstitions about angels, handed from father to son. We teach our children that angels are the servants of God, free from all sin. They exist but to do His will. Never by any chance do they disobey. Their bodies are subtle, pure, and formed of light, and need neither food, drink, nor sleep. They have no parents, and are free from sexual feeling and carnal lust. They were created only for the glorification of God. Some stand erect to adore Him. Others praise Him with bowed heads. Some devote their energies to imploring His mercy for

erring man. Others protect their earthly brethren. A number minister to the throne and to God's personal needs. More take record of the doings of humans. We Muhammadans hold that over every man watch two angels, a good one and a bad one, the good one usually having an ascendancy over his unpleasant brother. A good deed is recorded immediately, but when man has committed a crime, the good angel implores the bad one not to set it down for seven hours, in case the sinner repents. When devils try to force their way into Paradise, to pry into the affairs of the good, the angels rain blows upon their heads, which mortals see as falling stars."

Rumi settled well down to it.

"It was one of our customs to visit the graveyards on Thursday, Sabbath eve, imagining the dead to be capable of hearing, but not of answering. Unbelievers follow the Vedente creed which holds that nothing exists except God, the universe being only an appearance without reality. As a man in a dream sees imaginary objects, and in that state experiences ideal pleasure and pain, so is life nothing but a dream, there being only one resplendent light, which assumes different appearances. But the predominating faith follows Muhammad. We have always been devout in belief, and loyal to our holy places. Following an attack by Bedouin on the sacred Shi'a city of Samarra, a woman of my country sent money to build the present massive mud wall around the famous golden dome given by our Shah Nasr-ud-Din, and round the town. Therein lie the bones of the Tenth and Eleventh Imams, and the legend that there the Twelfth that will rise again one day. Samarra remains a great place for Iranian pilgrimage, and does a roaring religious trade. So many Persian corpses and pilgrims on their way there, passed through Baghdad, at one time, that the city was said to exist upon Persians, dead or alive. Before starting on the final journey, a body, partly embalmed, treated with camphor

and other chemicals, would be put in a coffin and kept on a shelf in a special room. Relatives came to drink tea from time to time, until the dead man was taken to Kerbala."

Mention of religion should not exclude the Armenians, whose small colonies have for long been tolerated in Iran. Their outlook is practical. When an Armenian priest was asked why Christ was put on the Cross, he answered that doubtless he was being punished for some crime he had committed!

The Persians respected astrologers more than doctors, and would seldom embark on an important enterprise without first consulting the oracle. At one time astrologers were the only doctors.

"In olden days," Rumi continued, "when a man received a gunshot wound, the first step towards a cure was to anoint the weapon with a special powder to prevent further accident. The wound was then tightly bound as an additional preventative to the gun repeating the offence. The victim often recovered, his cure being attributed to the powder upon the gun. The cure for toothache was to take a nail and scratch the gum near the afflicted tooth until it bled, when the nail was driven as hard and far as possible into a log of wood. When the wiseman failed to cure a sufferer he would declare that it was decided of God that the patient should die, therefore human aid was of no avail. For aye the patient was severely beaten, and quite often recovered.

The Astrologer Royal once failed to cure a Shah, who threatened to have him cut into mince meat," said Rumi. "Terrified, the astrologer prescribed the hot brains of a man. On the instant, came one soliciting the king's ear. The wretched man's brains were immediately pressed into service. A cure for plague was to kill an ox, skin it, and wrap the sufferer in the warm skin until he recovered. An infallible remedy for anything was said to be a drink of water that had washed the body of a dead man.

"We also used torture to effect cures," he continued blandly. "But they were largely to cure people of murder or thieving, or to aid their memories. One was to rip open the belly by plunging a poniard into the left side, and going right round to the back. In another, two saplings were bent to the ground and the victim secured by a leg to each of the trees, which were then released and sprang apart, tearing the victim in two. This form of death was said to have been invented for Bessus, the murderer of Darius. Impaling, amputating hands and legs, and immuring between four walls were common occurrences. To 'give a man the shoe' was to beat him with an iron-heeled slipper across the mouth, breaking his teeth. Other means of torture included being buried alive head uppermost in 'living gardens,' and hanging by the heels like butchers' meat in the market-place."

A high official would have his property confiscated and his harem broadcast. Common forms of torture were scooping out the eyes, boring the nose and tongue with an awl, blowing from the mouth of a mortar, beheading with a blunt chopper, and the bow-string. For perjury, the throat was crammed with tow or rags, molten lead being poured into the mouth. Swindlers were branded upon the forehead. Thieves and counterfeiters forfeited a hand, or were tied to camels' tails by the feet, or buried alive save for the head; their hands were cut off, the stumps afterwards being plunged by friends into boiling lard to prevent their bleeding to death, or, according to Tavernier, "torn to pieces by his dogs which he (the Governor) keeps a purpose for such chastisements."

Murderers were quartered or disembowelled alive, and carried about the streets until they died. Robbers were tied to the pillory in the bazaar, then trampled upon by elephants. Of three thieves, one was beheaded, one blown from the mouth of a mortar, and one cut in half and

hung for three days over a city gate. Variety was certainly the spice of life.

A Bedou bent on robbing his neighbour was caught with his hand beneath the fly of the tent. His hand was doomed to five years' imprisonment, and the owner given the option of going with it. He who stole a horse or steer was cut into two parts. Lesser thefts were punished by seven, seventeen, twenty-seven, up to seven hundred blows with a staff.

One form of torture was to build a mould round the victim, filling the cracks with plaster of Paris. He could breathe until the plaster started to expand. Another little game was to keep a hungry rat in a cage with a small opening through which it could nibble. The cage was then strapped each day to a different portion of the victim's anatomy. A death sentence was to be strangled with a bow-string or stifled between heavy felts. A horror was to pour molten silver into eyes and ears. In the pursuit of justice, the father was sometimes ordered to execute his erring son. If he delayed, the son was made to execute the father. If both refused, both were executed.

If a tradesman used false weights, his head was thrust into a hole in a plank which rested upon his shoulders; to the plank was fastened a bell; to his head a straw cap; thus he had to walk the streets in his shame.

Mediæval Persians brought cruelty to a fine art. Once a woman was forced to witness the slaughter of her young son, and the head was then cast into her lap. She threw it back, saying: "I do not take what I give to my God."

One torture showed refinement in cruelty, and a knowledge of anatomy. The naked victim was placed upon a board, lying upon his back, and firmly bound that he might not move. His tormentors then proceeded to rub his stomach very gently but persistently with two smooth bricks, using a circular motion. At first the bound man laughed and wriggled. Gradually the continuous

rubbing brought more and more blood to his stomach and he suffered intense agony until his belly burst.

A man doomed to capital punishment would sometimes be fastened by the heels to the pack-saddle of a camel, head nearly touching the ground. The body was cut with a sword, beginning between the legs, and finishing at the side of the neck. The two parts were afterwards led through the streets to a tree, from which the gruesome remains were hanged.

Those in power in the East would never hesitate to inflict ghastly cruelty on their kind, to please the slightest whim. Yet in England, during one reign, more than seventy thousand persons lost their lives at the hand of the common executioner, which was at least six daily, Sundays included!

Who are we to point the finger of scorn?

CHAPTER XXI

COME FILL THE CUP

IRAN has at last renounced the veil. In the country more familiar to us as Persia, gone for ever are the shrouded delights of the shahs of yesterday. We asked Rumi about the bad old days.

"Good old days," he replied, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"A title much sought after was that of Chief Holder of the Girdle of Beautiful Forms, whose occupation was to measure the ladies of the king's harem. If they increased noticeably in girth, they were made to fast until the Chief Holder declared them once more to the royal taste. The favourite queen was known as the Crown of the State. Upon the rare occasions when she went abroad, she rode upon horseback, using her lord's saddle; but so swathed in shawls and surrounded by black eunuchs was she that it was impossible to catch a glimpse of her. A journey in Iran to-day is a different affair from the caravan of old, when the women were heavily veiled, and time was of no consequence. In their *feringhee* dresses and silk stockings they now take their seats beside the men, and enter into animated conversation as the railway train draws out of the new station.

"The women's quarters were guarded by eunuchs or old men, called the Masters of the Harem Threshold," Rumi continued, warming to his theme. "Only black eunuchs were allowed to pass the white ones who kept the door. The Chief Black One would wait upon the king

at table, taste his food, valet him, and guard his jewellery. The badge of office was a small gold box hanging from his waist, shaped like a gondola, studded with jewels, and containing several fine white handkerchiefs, opium, perfumes, and cordials. The perplexities which beset these poor unfortunates are sad to contemplate.

“‘My master came to the cruel resolution to trust his women with me,’ wrote one to his lord, ‘and seduced me by a thousand promises and threats to part with myself for ever.’”

We learned that in the seraglio there were the same offices as at court, but held by women; Chief and Under-Equerries, Captain of the Gate, Captain of the Guard, Doctors, and Interrers of the Dead. Each woman had her own room, or shared it with an aged retainer, and might not visit her companions without permission.

“‘Speak unto the believing women,’” quoted Rumi, “‘that they restrain their eyes, and preserve their modesty, and discover not their ornaments, except what necessarily appeareth thereof; and let them throw their veils over their bosoms, and not show their ornaments, unless to their husbands.’”

Every man in the kingdom took unto himself a wife. Iranians observed a system of *mootah* connexions, by which a man might take a wife on lease. A pilgrim to Meshed could take a temporary one for a small fee, for a day or for ninety-nine years. Religion legalized the process, allowing him to divorce her before he returned to his home.

“When a man of Pem went on a journey lasting twenty days or more,” Rumi said, “he might indulge himself at each halt, allowing his wife at home to take somebody else’s absentee husband. In a certain district, when a stranger arrived, the husband would depart, and leave the guest in possession of his house, his hospitality, and his wife. When a Tartar lord forbade this practice, the people were forced to obey him, but after three years they could

stand it no longer, and asked that they might carry on the tradition of the fathers.

"‘Since you want your shame, you shall have it,’ said the Tartar."

They did.

In the early eighteenth century a man might take as many concubines as he could afford. When he had finished with one, she was ordered to remain chaste for forty days, lest she prove pregnant.

We asked how marriages were arranged.

"An authorized match-maker," Rumi replied, "tells the young man that waiting for him is a girl more blooming than the rose, more odoriferous than the violet, better formed than Hebe herself; until the boy's heart becomes as a glowing coal, and his liver is dried up."

A few rites accompanied marriage, performed within call of the bride and bridegroom, for the ceremony was by proxy. Finally a veil was thrown over the bride, who ate some aromatic seeds to sweeten her breath, and anointed herself with camphor and rose-water. She went to her new home on horseback, accompanied by relatives carrying sweetmeats, who invoked God's blessing on the marriage. On arrival they had a three- or thirty-day feast. Marriage was valid for any period from a week to a century, lest there be a mistake. In some places it was the custom publicly to display proof of virginity immediately after consummation. Legal marriage allowed four wives, who came equipped with clothes and jewels and a dowry. A bride neither expected nor received anything from her parents when they died, having already had her share. The bridegroom settled money upon his wife which was hers for ever, even if they parted. Women, however, became in such demand that the bridegrooms were at one time forced to pay compensation to the parents for taking their daughters from them. The countrywomen were strong, clean-limbed, and muscular, with large sparkling black

eyes. They were known to labour in the fields, go behind a hedge to have a baby, and carry it home as part of the day's work.

In the seventeenth century Persian women were "fair, with rather too much Ruddiness in their cheeks, their hair and eyes most black; a little Burly by reason they wear their clothes loose, yet not altogether so, but more at ease than our Dames; a Plump Lass being in more esteem than our Slender and strait laced Maidens."

"Their hair is long, their wit is short," was what Rumi had to say when asked about his countrywomen. "We also have a saying that no luck remains in the house where the hen crows like a cock."

He went on to tell us of an ancient queen whose establishment was large enough to accommodate one thousand partakers of the royal bed!

"Shame burns my cheek to a cinder," he said, "although I am assured that one plum gets colour by looking at another. We believe that the more we pray the more will be our wives in Paradise; but can you blame us for liking a little on account, as your shops write to me from England?"

We asked him what happened to bachelors and widowers.

"Widowers?"

"A man whose wife has died."

"We know not widowers. Our men have so many wives in the charm of their exaltation, that at least one is always guaranteed to outlive him."

If a man wished for a divorce, he might marry again immediately, but if he found occasion for a second divorce, he might not re-marry until his discard had found another mate. No woman might marry again until three months later, and, if she were a widow, after four months and ten nights.

We tackled Rumi on the subject of polygamy, and the evils of early marriage and excessive child bearing.

"Show me from the Holy Writ that any crime attaches to our enviable custom," he replied. "Days of content make wives of content and nights of content. We have a passage in the Quran which says that there is no celibacy in Islam, for wives must be to us and we to our wives as the garment is to the body. I have here," he went on, "a letter from my wife which causes me much satisfaction."

Pulling an envelope from his pocket, he proceeded, without the least sign of embarrassment, to read aloud:

"I seek thee by my side, and thou seem'st to fly from me. The fire that devours me, dissipates these enchantments itself, and recalls my wandering spirits. I find myself then so animated—thou wilt not believe it. Rumi, 'tis impossible to live in this condition. The fire burns in my veins. Why can't I express to thee what I feel so sensibly? In that moment, Rumi, I would give the Empire of the World for one kiss of thee. How unhappy is the woman whose desires are so violent, to be deprived of him who only can satisfy them; who, delivered up to herself, and having nothing to divert her, must live in a constant course of sighs, and the fury of a provok'd passion."

He folded the sheet, and hid further disclosures within the discretion of an envelope, but proffered a description of his wife, who, if what he said was true, must have been a treasure indeed.

"She is a beauty with eyes soft as the gazelle's," he said dreamily, "to watch my slumber and awake me with the babbling honey of her voice. She is a being whose long lashes are like the stem of a wild blossom when it stoops to kiss the river. Let her lull me to slumber by her murmuring kisses. Let me dance with her on a bed of undying flowers. I would have no sighing, nothing but a dreamy exchange of looks, the slow, deep current of indolent delight. Indescribable pleasure, imperturbably sweet, indefinitely prolonged."

We felt that perhaps we were glimpsing too intimate a

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picture of our friend's conjugal happiness, and that it was up to us to divert the subject into less personal channels. By way of a change, we asked him about divorce. He told us that one way of untying the matrimonial knot was invented by a man whose wife strayed. He denied water to a bull for several days, bound her beneath its belly, and drove it towards the river. Women known to have murdered their husbands were muffled in a veil and thrown from the city walls. If they erred from the straight path of marriage in the more usual way, they were thrust into sacks and drowned. Sterility was a great stigma. Bearing a daughter was only a shade better.

The women wore veils, breeches, and velvet stockings. They called petticoats "trousers with one leg" in contrast to their own voluminous black drawers tied at the ankle and sometimes attached to a stocking foot. All women did not wear black chaddars. Some villages sported old rose, others check, and others stripes. At one time they wore upon their heads a golden network interwoven with pearls, and, hanging in front of the ear, a gold medallion inscribed with a prayer. They blackened their hair and eyebrows with dye made from camphor leaves, and dyed their nails, hands, and the soles of their feet yellow. They believed in demons, dragons, desert fiends, and spectres which devoured both the living and the dead. They were as lazy as the day was long. Marmontel truly said of them *Passant la moitié de leur temps à ne rien faire, et l'autre moitié à faire rien*. But they were dull behind their pearl-sewn veils.

"Like counting cherry-stones to your rhyme of tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor," said Rumi, "Persian women tell the beads. They hold the rosary in both hands, dividing the string into a separate and unknown number of beads. They then shut their eyes and say 'Adam, Eve, Satan,' a name to each bead. If Adam falls on the last bead, good luck will attend the project. If Eve, the verdict is neutral,

and the rosary must be told again. If Satan ends the division, bad luck will ensue.

"Let me lighten the burden of your contemplation with the tale of a widow," he continued. "A Persian, advancing in years, married a young wife. Despite a disparity in age, she swore eternal fidelity to him, saying that when he died she would not bury him in the ground, but would find some means to preserve his body, that he might remain always with her.

"She kept her word.

"Not long afterwards a murderer was hanged in the market-place and left dangling as a warning to all beholders. One night a youthful soldier, on guard over the corpse, fell asleep at his post. Seizing the opportunity, the murderer's family quickly cut the body down, and bore it away. When the sentry awoke, his horror knew no bounds. His was a certain fate of death by torture. Where in the name of Allah could he find a substitute for the corpse? He ran towards the graveyard. On the way he passed the house of the widow. An idea. He told her his predicament and begged for her husband's body.

" 'On one condition,' said the widow, who was growing tired of her lonely estate. 'When your turn of sentry-go is over, you must marry me.'

"The soldier looked about him. Dawn was breaking. Eager that his guilt be not discovered, he was ready to promise anything, so together they bore off the corpse and hung it up in the market-place.

" 'Alas,' said he. 'Thy husband has long hair and a beard. The murderer had neither.'

"The woman girded up her skirts, climbed the gibbet, and cut off both, an insult to any good Muhammadan.

"When all was arranged to his satisfaction, the soldier laughed.

" 'Marry you?' he mocked. 'Look at you! You have not only hanged your husband as a murderer, you have

insulted him as well. Who knows what you might not do to me. Away with you.' ”

Rumi paused.

“Now tell us one with a happy ending,” we suggested.

“Would you like to hear a Persian idyll?”

“That sounds better.”

“I will tell to you a tale of love. A young man and his betrothed walked in an exquisite garden, fashioned upon Paradise, and as appealing as a garden could be. His arm encircling her waist, as they traversed the perfect lawn, he turned to her.

“ ‘Sweet Love, I dreamed about you last night,’ he said. ‘We were in a garden such as this, only even more subtly conceived, more divinely expressed. So enchanted was I that I tried to kiss you. As I did so, you lost your being and turned into a lovely rosebud on a bush at the side of a wide avenue. There you were, radiant among the other flowers, slowly opening as I approached. I grew excited and hurriedly stooped to pluck you; when you quickly transformed yourself into a colourful butterfly, and flew between my fingers. By then I was in a fever and ran after you as you gaily flitted from flower to flower, with an air of enchantment fascinating to behold, strange in appeal. At the end of the garden lay a Persian pool, in the midst of which stood an ancient sundial. You flew across this pool, and, to my joy, settled on a statue of Gypsoe, apparently exhausted by your play in the sunlight. I arrived at the edge of the pool. Taking off my shoes and socks, hat in hand I waded towards you, fearful lest you should take alarm at my purpose. Nearer, yet nearer I came, until I was within arms’ length of you once more. I clamped my hat over you. To my alarm you darted out from beneath the brim and flew gaily over the pond. Half way across you fell into the water, where, to my great relief, you turned into a glorious water lily, as fragrant as any in the world. I was in a torment. Eagerly

I threw away my hat and took off the rest of my clothes, that I might the more easily swim towards you and seize you at long last. Diving from the statue, I came near to you, fingers tingling at my thoughts. With a frantic effort I tried to grasp you, but as I did so you turned into a canoe and drifted away from me. By this time I was in no mood for trifles. Swimming strongly, I laid both my hands on you, but . . . as I was trying to get into you, you turned over.' ”

Rumi smiled.

“Unfortunate is he who has not the merit of indifference,” he remarked, as he sipped a glass of Shiraz wine.

“Wine, Women, and Song,” we murmured, in a successful attempt to encourage the old roué.

“‘Still a Ruby kindles in the Vine, and many a Garden by the Water blows,’” he continued. “Even the Mongols were fond of the bottle. Did not the Scourge of God counsel: ‘A man who is drunk is like one struck on the head. His wisdom and skill avail him not at all. Get drunk only three times a month. It would be better not to get drunk at all. But who can abstain altogether?’ ”

Rumi turned to the D.P., a connoisseur of wines. “What think you of Iranian wines, Excellence?”

“The first vineyards I saw,” the D.P. replied, “were at Shiraz. Some grapes grew in broad fields, between rich meadows, but many were on terraced slopes, so steep as to appear devoid of soil, each root in its own small pocket of earth. A know-all volunteered that the grapes used to be loaded into donkey panniers to go to the press, but this I can hardly credit. To make good wine, for which Shiraz has ever been famous, the gathered grapes must not travel, but must go directly to the press. Fermentation starts within an hour of plucking the fruit. If the grapes are bruised, then exposed to the air, the juice immediately ferments, and quickly affects adjacent fruit. Fermented grape juice does not augur well for fine wine.”

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His opinion was that the wines of Shiraz, however excellent, were badly prepared for market; indeed one might almost conclude that the makers were reluctant to sell their wares. Upon the sample bottles produced for his inspection we saw no trace of any label. One type of wine had been put into a derelict beer bottle. Other bottles, obviously old, were mould-ribbed in imitation of a well-known brand of French cognac. The corks were of poor quality.

"Their red and white wines," continued he, "are similar. Both tend towards sweetness. Nobody could give any names to the samples shown us, nor did there appear to be more than a remote possibility of continuity in style and quality. It does not follow that red wine comes from black grapes. It is a question of whether the skins are left with the juice during fermentation. Some Shiraz wines are made from Khollah grapes. The supposition that the name sherry is a corruption of Shiraz, and that sherry wine was first made there, is erroneous. Sherry was originally made in Spain."

A legend tells that Noah planted the first vine on Mount Ararat; but Jamshid, the founder of Persepolis, is supposed to have invented wine when he gave his sick wife some fermented grape juice. She fell into a deep sleep and recovered. Some Shiraz vines, indeed, are still called Jamshids, and the present roots are said to be as old as Persepolis.

When Antigonus captured Susa he found there a celebrated golden vine, although Shiraz is the earliest known place where mention of wine is made in literature.

"We have always been devotees of wine," volunteered Rumi, "and say that if we come to a conclusion upon an important subject when we are intoxicated, and confirm that conclusion the next morning when sober, that settles the matter."

He went on to tell us how guests summoned to a royal

banquet dined in full view of the common people. Some supped in one of two rooms facing each other. In the other sat the Shah in solitary state, occasionally inviting someone into his chamber. At a drinking party a eunuch ushered them in one by one, to sit upon the ground beneath the golden feet of the Shah's couch, drinking an inferior wine to his. Great magnificence was displayed at these banquets, at the expense of camels, oxen, asses, stags, sheep, and birds, which were slaughtered; the guests taking away what they wished, the remnants being fed to spearmen, the bodyguard, and the servants in lieu of wages.

"Sometimes," said Rumi, "when the reigning prince gave an *al fresco* party, rugs for the guests were placed upon a bed of rose petals, as large as a haystack."

A hundred years or so ago a Swedish doctor owned a vineyard at Shiraz, whence his donkeys would carry black and white grapes, travelling by night to avoid the sun. The grapes were pressed, as in the days of Noah, by bare feet, the juice being poured into vessels, leaving skins and a few stalks for colour and tannin. For sweet wine the grapes were late gathered. After three days the must was racked off the skins and stalks. Dry wine matured in twenty days.

"In the nineteenth century," said the D.P., "Shirazi and Isfahani wines were sent to Europe, but experts are now of the opinion that it does not travel sufficiently well to warrant export. So far as I could see casks are not used, but earthenware vessels."

Rumi listened with interest.

"We have a proverb," said he, "that to be happy a man must marry a wife from Yezd, which breeds our most handsome women, eat the bread of Yezdikast, and imbibe the wine of Shiraz. The Quran forbids us to allow wine to pass our lips; but when our Lord Muhammad propounded his teaching, he was in favour of moderate drinking.

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Is it not written that the righteous shall be given pure wine, sealed; and that the seal thereof shall be musk? One day Muhammad passed a group of merry-makers.

"‘These men,’ he observed, ‘were enemies. After a little wine they have become friends. Wine is good. Wine is God’s gift.’

"That evening he repassed the group, who were quarrelling violently. He decided that wine was sinful, after all.

"‘Where there is a will there is a way,’ he continued. ‘Good Moslems, who wished to drink intoxicants, evaded the law by importing Jews to make wine at Shiraz, and Armenians at Tabriz and Isfahan. Thus they soiled neither hand nor conscience by preparing the stuff; but, if they wished, they could indulge their fancy behind closed doors. Sometimes one of our kings would issue a decree that for three days only his subjects might drink as much wine as they liked, and ‘loose their fingers in the tresses of the cypress-slender Minister of Wine.’ If they were found intoxicated after that period their heads were struck off.’"

At Isfahan we tested Tavernier’s assertion that “the wine of Isfahan is cold upon the stomach, but that it fumes into the head.” We found both red and white wine, the latter preferable; also a good light beer.

"We tasted a few drinkable specimens," said the D.P., "carefully bottled and helpfully labelled, but apparently no first-class wine is made there."

Incidentally, the retail prices seemed very low, usually about one shilling and twopence a bottle.

"In the royal apartment of the Shahs at Isfahan," Rumi told us, "above the head of the bed hung a golden vine with bunches of grapes fashioned from a myriad precious stones. Nearby stood a bowl filled with water, of which only the king and his eldest son might partake. Two rooms opened off the royal bed chamber. That

beyond the head of the bed was called the King's Pillow, and contained five couches and five thousand golden talents. The second, called the King's Footstool, had three couches and three thousand silver talents."

At Hamadan a light amber-coloured wine was shown to us at dinner. We found it honestly made and, considering its low cost, pleasant to drink.

"Kermanshah not only produces wine in the tall slender bottle associated with hock and moselle," observed the D.P., "but the makers have adopted the name of Chablis, which is four thousand miles away. Grape-growing conditions are naturally different, so the Iranian wine can have no possible claim to similarity with its namesake. This wine is of poor quality, although the bottles bear a tolerably pleasing label partly printed in Persian characters."

Kermanshah makes a vermouth not unlike the Italian variety, and quite a useful substitute. We were told that an imitation of whisky, too, was forthcoming, bottle and label identical with a well-known Scottish brand, save that the lettering is in Persian.

Chardin mentions the abundant fine vines of Kazvin, with golden grapes famous through the ages, vineyards and orchards bestriding the rich plains about the town and watered by an ancient system of sunken wells. The quality of the wine, however, was none too good, for the makers left the pips in the juice, which induced a harsh and bitter taste.

Vines even stretched to the shores of the Persian Gulf. Qishm Island was celebrated for white wine, immortalized by Thomas Moore:

"Vases filled with Kismee's golden wine
And the red weepings of the Shiraz vine."

"Iran, if she wishes to increase her sale of wines, must look to her laurels," said the D.P. "She must supply proper bottles, design attractive labels and, above all,

maintain continuity of type. I wished to ship some to England, to toast the immortal memory of Omar Khayyam with the type of wine which he must so often have drunk himself—perhaps made with grapes from the very same vine. But I was informed that I must obtain a government permit for export, and that I might expect endless delay, for Iran has no expert packers, nor the technique of that trade. Further, the wine does not travel well. All this could be easily remedied if the merchants would but look to it. As a matter of fact, I believe the government is building a wine press, where the output will be supervised, under a state monopoly. It is difficult to procure foreign wines and spirits in Iran. It is not only a question of paying through the nose for them. They simply are not there to drink.”

We could endorse this. At Chalus we had paid three guineas for a bottle of champagne, and gin was thirty shillings a cork. A whisky and soda in a Teheran café cost half a crown. Sherry was an almost unknown luxury.

Our thoughts naturally turned to Omar Khayyam:

“And if the Wine you drink, the Lip you press,
End in what All begins and ends in—Yes;
Think then you are *To-day* what *Yesterday*
You were—*To-morrow* you shall not be less.”

At Nisapur, on the road to Meshed, lies the tomb of an astronomer, without honour as a poet in his own country, but with fame abroad, thanks to Edward Fitzgerald. Born in Khorassan in the middle of the eleventh century, Omar lived to be seventy-five. Khayyam means tent-maker, the family trade he followed before the Vizier Nizam-ul-Mulk offered him high office. Contrary to custom he refused preferment and stated that all he wished was to pursue the sciences under the shadow of the Source of Grandeur. So the Vizier gave him a pension which enabled him to pass the rest of his days in search of know-

ledge. He became famed as Astronomer Royal, and wrote books on mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy. Like Byron, Omar started as the idol of those around him, but he became ostracized because of his freedom of thought and speech. He showered ridicule upon the Sufis, poets whose school of thought was not unlike his own, and who mirrored his writing, except that they turned his practical whimsicalities into mystery, cloaking his plain precepts in a ritual which appealed to many.

Omar Khayyam was as honest in his faults as in his fancies. If he could not find a divine will and purpose in the creed he followed and preached, he would not invent one. He contented himself with Destiny, and preferred to seek solace through the senses than to worry about the future. His fruitless, desperate teaching, probably influenced to some extent by the creed of Hassan and his Assassins, began and ended in sensuality, and left the problems of God, of right and wrong, of life and death, where he found them, in the hay heap of ecstasy. As of Byron, it is said of Omar, that his works reflect the man himself rather than the world in which he moved, or the times in which he lived.

Edward Fitzgerald paraphrased and translated the *Rubáiyát*. He wrote lightly of his work: "Not that the Persian has anything at all new; but he has dared to say it." Actually there is but slender connexion between Fitzgerald's rendering and the original, but the oriental mysticism seemed to provide his inspiration, and he produced a greater work than the original ever aspired to be.

Iranians are not only intellectual, they appreciate the senses, delighting in a mystic combination of body and soul, seeing therein a medium in which they can float between this world and the next, between Paradise and everyday life, with poesy as an elegant excuse. Truth, with her twin sister, Make Believe, could not live to better

purpose than in Iranian poetry, where all that is honest in life plays with the dreamy whimsicality of miasmal ancestry. Her poets have written round three love stories: the romance of Khosroe and Shirin, the sacred love of Yussuf and Zuleika, and the misfortunes of Majnun and Leila.

Form in poetry was rigorously observed. A common measure often found at the end of a poem was known as the cooing of doves, where the letters corresponded and the rhyme agreed, forming an anagram, or able to be read backwards or forwards with equal sense. The ode treated of delights of the flesh and of wine, the name of the poet often woven into the last couplet. Another measure was called wedded, for the rhymes were even, each with a complete and distinct ending.

Verses were usually written upon strongly scented silky paper, treated with a gold or silver powder, upon which the poem was inscribed in indelible ink and profusely illuminated. Therefore Persian poetry was called esoteric and mystical, rich in forcible expression, bold in metaphor, its sentiment full of fire, and animated with lively colouring.

Zoroaster, in the seventh century before Christ, chanted his prophet's song. A thousand years later, to Bahram Gur is ascribed the invention of the rhyming couplet, thanks to his beloved, Heart's Ease, when she accompanied him on the chase. He grappled with a lion, likening himself to a wild elephant. Heart's Ease caught up the cadence and compared him with a lofty mountain. The end of her line happened to rhyme with his. Thus poesy was born.

A century or so later, Khosroe evolved a rhyming distich which he engraved on the palace wall at Qasr-i-Shirin.

"Hidden among the cypress trees," explained Rumi, "he overheard a lad singing in the moonlight. So enchanted was the king that he created him a court poet. When the king's charger, Black-as-Night, died, none dared

tell him save the poet, who wove the sad news into verse until Khosroe guessed the truth."

Mahmoud of Ghizni, at the end of the tenth century, installed a round table of poets. After the fashion of King Arthur and his knights, Mahmoud gathered men of letters around him. Essedi of Tus was his court poet, later eclipsed by his great pupil, Firdausi. When the Shah commanded Essedi to write the history of Persia, he pleaded old age, and deputed Firdausi, the Man of Paradise, one of the four hundred good men and true collected by Mahmoud to appease his passion for poetry.

Firdausi, Persia's first epic poet, worked for five and twenty years before being summoned to court, where three learned men proved him with three hard rhymes. The *Shah-Nameh*, or *Book of Kings*, his chief work, mingled with allegorical fable the romance of his country's ancient history. He, more than anyone, consolidated his native tongue, and was fully aware of the fact.

"From poesy I've raised a tower high;
Which neither wind nor rain can ever harm;
Over this work the years shall come and go;
And he that wisdom hath shall learn its charm."

His famous poem ends with the well-known lines:

"Much have I laboured, much read o'er
Of Arabic and Persian lore,
Collecting tales unknown and known;
Now two-and-sixty years are flown.
Regret, and deeper woe of sin,
'Tis all that youth has ended in,
And I with mournful thoughts rehearse
Bu Tahir Khusrawani's verse:
'I mind me of my youth and sigh,
Alas for youth, for youth gone by.'"

Mahmoud promised one toman for every verse. When the time came to pay for sixty thousand, he was dilatory,

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and eventually paid in silver instead of in the usual gold tomans. Firdausi was in a Turkish bath when the money arrived. In disgust he gave a third to the attendant, a third to the waiter, and the remaining third to the elephant man who had brought the money. He then left the country and devoted himself to composing scurrilous observations upon the very kings whose praises he had sung with such gusto. Ashamed, Mahmoud sent him the gold tomans; but the caravan arrived as Firdausi's funeral procession wound over the hillside. He left behind these bitter lines:

"In Mahmoud who shall hope to find
One virtue to redeem his mind?
A mind no gen'rous transports fill;
To truth, to faith, to justice chill!"

Whereas Omar wrote around one subject only, Persia demanded a higher standard from her poets; something to embrace all manner of life and thought and deed. As the Aga Khan wrote in *The Times*: "A great poet should be able to inspire a man in any circumstances of his life."

Persian culture had a dominating effect on Islam and thus upon India. Firdausi was called the Homer of Persia. Hafiz's love poems have no equal. He ranks with Shakespeare, and has been mirrored in the likeness of Milton, Burns, Dante, and even Horace. Sadi's verse proffers that spiritual uplift which marks the master. He is read far and wide, high and low, and provides inspiration to millions. Moore summed the three Persians up in the words: "The copious flow of Firdausi, the sweetness of Hafiz, and the sententious march of Sadi."

We wondered how these simple men captured the imagination of those who lived among or after them. What were the features and qualities common to their lives and conduct? Whence their fame? They had a sound grounding in mythology, added to professional skill

in the use of words. They also had another common denominator—strength of character. But however complete their knowledge, however strong their characters, fortune controlled the stage upon which they acted. Opportunity, hot upon the heels of success, gave them what birth, scholarship, and industry alone could never give. To strike the right note at the right time was an essential prelude to the play which followed. Their world waited for something new. These poets not only provided that something, they had the merit, the opportunity, and the personality to succeed. Their task was not even then complete. Success had not merely to crown endeavour, it had to inspire ambition; but it was not by any means only early success which made these men great. That was but the beginning, the spur.

Each generation has produced their kind, sensing the mood of the day. A few live on. The circumstances which surround a poet's life may give him the experience, the knowledge, and the incentive to achieve the very merit upon which he must ultimately be judged—*flos poetarum*.

CHAPTER XXII

HUBBLE-BUBBLE

"FOR countless ages," said Rumi, "we Iranians have cultivated the Flower of Peace; long before your Sir Raleigh laid down his cloak for your Virgin Queen, so successful as a queen. Did not he claim to bring tobacco from America? The true origin was the condolence of a young Persian who lost a wife he loved with the fierce fire of passion. He did everything to forget. He took concubines by the score and four virgin wives. But he could not lose himself. At last he told his sorrow to a holy man, who counselled him thus:

" 'Go to thy wife's tomb. There pluck a weed which you will find growing at the head. Place it in a hollow reed, light it at one end, and inhale the smoke from the other. That will comfort you.'

"The distraught one obeyed. Thus he learned to sit upon the carpet of patience and smoke the pipe of contentment."

Rumi offered us a cigarette.

"We have another tale of the origin of tobacco. Once upon a time Muhammad found a viper frozen upon the ground. He picked it up and put it in his sleeve for warmth. When the viper thawed it said:

" 'O, Prophet, I am going to bite you.'

" 'Why?' asked he.

" 'Because there is war between your people and mine,' it said, suiting action to word.

"The Prophet sucked the poison from the wound,

and spat on the ground. Up sprang a tobacco plant, mingling the bitterness of the serpent's tooth with the Prophet's sweet saliva.

"An ancient Arabic manuscript says that Nimrod smoked. Shah Abbas, who did not, tried to dissuade his nobles from the habit. At a certain feast he had the pipes filled with horse dung, which looked much the same as tobacco, and asked the guests what they thought of the new brand sent by the Governor of Hamadan. The guests said it was the best ever, and that it smelt like a thousand flowers.

"'Cursed be the drug,' said the Shah, 'that cannot be discerned from the dung of horses.'

"Smoking on horseback was a luxury," continued Rumi. "Every man of rank was accompanied by a mounted servant bearing the business end of a *nargileh* and a small brazier, which it was his duty to keep glowing as he tended his master's pipe. From the stirrups dangled two iron chafing dishes filled with glowing charcoal. The master smoked through a long tube, his pipe being carried upon the servant's horse a few paces in the rear. The *nargileh* was invented by a man who first made a gurgling pipe in order to drown an infirmity in his throat. The best kind was made in Bohemia, head and pipe of brass or wood."

Iranian smokers affect a particularly elegant variety, inlaid with silver, and consider the wood from a pear tree best and sweetest for the stems, filling the bowl with rose water.

Two hundred and fifty years ago Chardin wrote:

"You see some in taking it, that have good Stomachs, make great Bubbles, and cause great Murmurings in the Water by the Attraction of Air. These Bottles are commonly fill'd with Flowers to give Pleasure to the Eye. They change at least once a Day the Water, which is all corrupted, and smells very rank of the Spirit of Tobacco. I have made an Experiment, and found that a Cup-full of that

Water is a great Emetick, and would almost make a man Vomit his Heart up.

"This mad Inclination to Tobacco, is an ill Habit. . . . Everyone smoakes, Persian gentry smook while riding, visiting during business, tutor and pupil at the colleges, they would rather miss dinner than tobacco, and during Ramazan the first thing they go for at sunset is a pipe Aded Chud, it is a habit."

"During Ramazan," said Rumi, "when the Mullah proclaims sunset, some men take opium to whet the appetite, but the most go straight to their tobacco pipes. During meals they smoke *nargilehs* after every course, each contributing a soft gurgle as he imbibes through water, described by a European friend of mine as a concert of bassoons. A *nargileh* is fitted with a glass pipe, through which the smoke is cooled by water before reaching the mouth, the finest flavour being savoured by the servant who prepares it. The smoke is of course inhaled. The tobacco we use is usually light brown, dry, and mild. The best came from Shiraz, but the trade dwindled as the people fell into lazy ways."

Byron sensed the supreme contentment of the Persian when he wrote:

"Sublime tobacco! which from east to west
Cheers the tar's labour or the Turkman's rest;
Which on the Moslem's Ottoman divides
His hours, and rivals opium and his brides."

In 1891 a concession was granted to a London syndicate for the monopoly of handling all tobacco in Persia. The capital and annual profit were each about half a million sterling, of which over fifty thousand pounds was to go to the Persian Government; in effect into the pockets of the Shah and his ministers. The wretched peasants grew tired of this whim. Following the leadership of their priests, they closed the tobacco shops and put away their

pipes until the trade all but ceased, forcing the Shah to cancel the concession and to pay half a million indemnity at a high rate of interest; which, incidentally, still had to be borne by the people. The industry is now a state monopoly. A large factory near Teheran holds about fifty modern machines, from which the government hopes to turn out twelve million cigarettes a day.

"So great a hold has tobacco upon the lives of my countrymen," Rumi told us, "that were you to stop both men and women smoking you might stop their lives, thus losing much revenue to the state. Shah Sefi ordered his people to cease. In spite of this he discovered two merchants smoking. He had them bound and brought before him. Melted lead was poured down their throats until they died in an agony of torture."

But tobacco has ever had a strong hold over the peasants, who find their beloved peace therein. For those who seek deeper oblivion there is opium, easy of access, and seldom relinquished once the habit has taken a firm hold.

The properties of the poppy were known in Sumerian times, millennia before the birth of Christ. A medicinal ingredient in 700 B.C., it was sometimes called *tirak*, after an ancient concoction, which included the flesh of a snake, called Tynes.

Isfahan is the centre of the industry, the peasants claiming that their opium is the best in the world. Fields of large poppies grow everywhere astride the roads. When the flowers fade and the petals fall away, acres of bulbous-headed stalks wave sensefully in the breeze. To garner the crop, the labourer scratches each pod and collects the fluid. The scratches have to be carefully made or the sap drips inside. Pods are usually scraped on three successive evenings, the yield dried and cleansed before the sun has a chance to melt it the next day. The fluid is carried in copper vessels, and now, showing the trend of the times, in kerosine oil tins with a skin stretched across the top;

to be tipped into copper pans some five feet across and one and a half deep, not unlike those used for purifying sugar in the co-operative factories of the Indian peasants.

The liquid, of a density which varies according to the locality, is stirred with a ladle until the right consistency is reached. Then a quantity is thrown on to an iron-bound plank shaped like a surf-board. For two days men knead the opium, allowing it to lie fallow from nightfall to morning. When the sun does not shine they have no call to work. Happy Iran! After many grey days they are obliged to use artificial heat to stimulate the kneading, although it has not the same effect. The opium is then compressed into bricks four inches long, each weighing about a pound, and packed into a hundred and eighty compartments of a large tin tray. When matured, each cake is wrapped in paper and put in a small box ready to go into wooden cases.

Opium poppies yield rich returns to peasant and plutocrat alike, not only from the drug, but from oil extracted out of the seeds, which are crushed into pulp beneath the grindstone of a mill propelled by a camel. Although the chamber is high and very dark, the camel's eyes are blindfolded to prevent him becoming giddy as he slowly pads round and round, emitting an occasional grunt or two. A man continually shovels seeds beneath the heavy wheel, which extracts most of the oil from the pods. They are then collected in flat open baskets for further pressure. In one corner these are stacked in a deep pit, one upon the other. A perspiring stalwart climbs nimbly up rude scaffolding fixed to the wall. He lowers from the rafters one end of a huge tree trunk until it rests upon the pile of baskets. With levers, pulleys, and wedges, the weight crushes the last ounce of oil from the seeds. A fierce glow from the furnace illumines brown bodies as they bend to their task, hammering a wedge here, altering one there, or exerting rippling muscles to haul on a pulley.

When the oil has been extracted the seed husks are dug into the soil for manure.

Iran is alleged to export upwards of six hundred tons of opium each year, although she is a member of the League of Nations. But one can understand her reluctance to give up an industry of such prime importance, which not only produces revenue, but gives her something with which to barter for the foreign commodities she dearly needs. Apart from the controlled trade, and in spite of close vigilance, a great deal of smuggling goes on. For local use, and local embraces the whole of Iran, the opium is made into long, shiny, thin brown cigars, each costing about two *rials* (sixpence), and loosely wrapped in a cylinder of white paper. The purchaser breaks the cigar and puts it in a pipe, the better to enjoy the flavour. Another way of smoking opium is to knead a tablet so that it adheres just below a round hole at the end of a wooden tube in a china bowl. A red-hot coal is held near enough to heat the opium until it smoulders, when the smoker inhales through the tube.

Home consumption is about fifty times that authorized by the League. Government does its best to suppress the habit, but it is too deeply rooted, and the profit is too great to operate a sound scheme.

"One person in every ten in Teheran is reported to be an addict," Rumi told us, "and we have a saying that of every three people in Kerman, four take opium. The smoker's colour is livid, his eye dull and hollow, and his breath like that of a dying man. But if opium bringeth leanness to thy body, despair not," he said cheerfully. "In this way shalt thou offer less to snakes and worms."

Opium surely is the curse of the country. Sleep-sodden Iranians sire children from little more than children, steeped in opium from birth. Babies fall asleep sucking the thumb of a father or mother who has fingered the drug, or who is in some way responsible for its manufacture, sale,

or barter. Their faces are smoked into by the same parents, until all lie still in the hideous silence of apathy.

"Let us forget ourselves," said Rumi, breaking the train of thought induced by the opium discourse. "Stretch your legs no further than the size of this carpet, and I will tell you about its like.

"The history of Persian rugs began five thousand years ago when the same sort of rugs were made in much the same way as they are now. The patterns fall into two main divisions, the symmetrical or floral pattern, and that in which the maker gives his fancy full rein. One of the most famous carpets was made of silk, sixty ells long, and woven with diamonds and pearls. It was as beauteous as the most comely maiden, for the heart beat wildly when the eyes of covetousness gazed upon what the grasping hands of all the passions burned to possess. This treasure was stolen at the sack of Ctesiphon. My country has produced many famous carpets, now scattered all over the earth. The industry has ever been important to us. Like the milk of a woman to the first son of her heart's desire, it is the product of direct labour and thus of real wealth. Since the thirteenth century Europe has imported our rugs, which at first were used as table-cloths. Some ancient carpets are of undeniable beauty and of great value. In your London museums you have many exquisite examples from Hamadan, Khorassan, Joshagan, and the Bakhtiari country. A handsome specimen of Senns, made in the nineteenth century, was presented to England by one of our Shahs, and now hangs near a big woollen pile carpet from the mosque at Ardebil, the date being woven into the pattern. You have a rug of the sixteenth century showing blue lions, with dull red spots, preying upon deer; and groups of three angels with large wings, one holding a peacock in her arms. Also you have a wondrous cope in knotted silk pile, partly woven in gold and silver thread, with as many knots, every one tied by hand, as there are

cypress trees in the Gardens of the Dead. It is a unique example of a vestment made by the carpet process in the late sixteenth century. The back portrays the crucifixion, with a male and female figure at the foot of the cross. An angel hovers on each shoulder, against a background of formal coloured flowers. The fine workmanship, unequalled in the whole world, was originally executed in my country for Christians, and went to an Armenian Convent at Jerusalem, where it was cut into a dalmatic. Dealers hacked off small pieces as samples. About forty years since, the remnant was bought in Paris for your Victoria and Albert Museum, to which, a few years ago, a Frenchman presented a small fitting fragment."

We had attended the exhibition of Persian art at Burlington House, which brought together four of the world's most famous carpets: the sixteenth century Medallion, the Animal carpet contemporary with it, and the renowned Ardabil and Emperor carpets. Of the rugs at the Antique Fair in London in 1935, one, of a rare Isfahan design, was valued at a thousand pounds. But the day of the Persian carpet, no matter how powerful it once was, will soon pass. Old carpets grace the walls of connoisseurs and of the few remaining grandees in Iran, but the time has gone when peasants would set forth on their donkeys laden with rugs, followed by others bearing a similar load. The collapse is due to lack of a market. Factories are closed. Villages which used to send hundreds of bales to the outside world are destitute. Money sunk in the carpet industry, with hope of rich reward, has gone for ever.

Thus, like the rats of Hamelin, the rugs of Iran have fallen into the hands of those seeking a low market for the big shops of Europe and America, with money to spend on the right sort of carpets at the right price, buying from impoverished people who have had many lean years in an industry from which the bottom has completely fallen. Anxious to realize their few remaining assets, the

peasants produced their all. From Kazak came velvety rugs; long narrow carpets from Kurdistan. Bokhara sent bundles of dark plum-coloured ones with the elephant foot and hatchlie design. Prayer rugs came from Daghistan, and fine designs from Cabristan. From Kashan came rust-coloured carpets. Hamadan sent ancient camel-hair strips. Shirvan produced hundreds of small rugs of every age. Who will get the money? Those who made them? Not a bit of it. Little enough will the child workers see, or for that matter the factors who employ them. As the carpets find their way to Western drawing-rooms, those who handle them will reap reward out of all proportion to the price paid at Isfahan, or Hamadan, or wretched Sultanabad.

"It is a pretty sight," continued Rumi, "to see our women walking up and down, spinning the long strands on their rapidly twisting shuttles. They wear brightly coloured clothes with coloured handkerchiefs over their heads. As they walk up and down, spinning, they laugh and chatter like a lot of birds in a copse. We Iranians are a gay, good-tempered people, as well we may be, living as we do in the sun most of the time."

The spun wool must be dyed, a process which is kept a mystery. Every dyer is jealous of his secrets; so jealous, that until he reaches his deathbed a father will keep his formula from his own son. A sudden or accidental death may lose the family secret for ever.

"Red is made from madder," Rumi volunteered, "ground and boiled with pomegranate rind and grape-juice."

Walnut-husks, straw, saffron, and indigo are also used. It is no uncommon sight to see a dyer dipping the wool into his vat, his bare arms blue to the elbow with indigo, as though he had been bathing them in ink. The way they arrive at the other colours is their own business.

After the wool has been dipped in various pots, each with its own colour, and has dripped itself dry in the sun

without being squeezed or wrung, it is rinsed in clear water and dried again. The wool is then ready for weaving, when the operation of making the rug begins. If you watch an Iranian woman squatted in front of her loom you realize the almost instinctive skill of someone trained from childhood to the work, with hundreds of years of inherited tradition behind her. Her shuttle bobs backwards and forwards across the wool. Her lithe fingers fidget as they tie the innumerable knots. Her loom is a very home-made affair, reminding us of one of the drawings of Mr. Heath Robinson—oddments of wood and string. Yet out of that intricate contraption is fashioned the Persian rug.

Rumi told us a thing or two about how to look after his country's carpets, views endorsed by Misrahi, the expert in Baghdad.

"It should not be supposed," he said, "that because an old or antique rug is worth a lot of money the first thing to do after purchasing a beautiful and comparatively modern one is to use it more or less as a doormat. It is a great mistake to be under the impression that the more a piece is worn the more valuable it is. An old worn length may be worth a considerable sum, particularly if its design is unique and its colouring good. But a modern piece will not be worth any more in ten or fifteen years because it is worn down to the fabric through being placed just inside the front door. We do not wear great heavy boots, but soft sandals on our feet. The question of wear therefore does not affect a rug in the East. Where your boots and shoes destroy the pile, our sandals or bare feet help to make it lustrous and, after the passage of time, to give it the soft appearance of age and beauty.

"A Persian rug," he continued, "should never be shaken or beaten or hung carelessly; nor should it be brushed against the nap. Brush it with or across the nap. A Hoover is excellent for cleaning, for its action of gently sweeping the surface as it sucks out the dirt is admirable.

HUBBLE-BUBBLE

Do not deliberately leave a carpet which you prize, constantly in the direct rays of the sun, even if you know the dyes are pure vegetable. I do not say that the colours will fade, but the average Oriental home is not brightly illuminated from the outside. The sun cannot do the piece any good, although probably no harm would be apparent in your own lifetime."

Rumi told us of the young manager of a carpet factory he knew, who drew a weekly wage of two hundred *tomans*, a sum he deemed inadequate to maintain him and his establishments in the luxury to which he was accustomed. He raffled his salary among the thousand employees of the firm at one *toman* a ticket, deducted under his eye at the pay table. A few non-participants lost their jobs, in order to make matters go with a swing. Those who took a book of tickets were always likely to fill important vacancies. He soon reached the thousand *toman* figure!

At Isfahan we were allowed to wander about a factory. We did not let the owner realize that the whole place filled us with horror, for he was proud of it, and delighted to see tiny fingers deftly fashioning flowers and birds in intricate designs upon a finely grained string frame. We entered a dingy vault, so dark we could not at first see to pick the way. As our eyes grew accustomed to the darkness we saw, immediately before us, obscuring the doorway, a high frame strung with strands of thick cotton. At the foot, upon rough wooden benches, their bare feet resting upon cold stone, sat four or five little boys, aged perhaps six or seven. At one end, propped against the framework, stood a paper facsimile of the carpet, divided into squares like a needlework pattern, stiffened upon a wooden board. A foot or two away workers sat upon a plank suspended in mid-air above our heads as they laboriously climbed up the pattern upon another large frame, like sailors painting the side of a ship. Others in various stages filled the chamber. Baby voices lisped directions of colours and stitches in a

dreary drone. Learners repeated the words in a low monotone. As we passed from loom to loom, small feet hung from their perches, poking through huge holes in ragged cotton sacks. With a curiously rhythmical, sing-song movement, the little carpet makers swayed back and forth in time to the pattern they wove. Ever and anon, one pressed down his work with a large curry-comb. Another, using long-handled scissors, pared the surplus wool above the knot.

Three or four small boys were copying a drawing of the Hall of Forty Pillars in silk, exquisitely fine, most trying of all to fashion. In a corner, putting finishing touches to an almost completed rug, we shook hands with an expert who can make his work look as if it were several hundred years old. With a small pair of curved nail scissors he was busy trimming recalcitrant ends of wool.

In an adjoining room, lighter than the main one only by virtue of a hole which occupied half the roof, a grown man, for a change, was dyeing wool already spun into rough hanks in the villages. Hand-spun wool is much stronger than that manipulated by machinery. The skeins are flung into a cauldron filled with the required colour, where they boil fast for the first couple of hours, before simmering at a constant heat for a day and a night. Freshly dyed wool is exposed to the sun for two days before being soaked in pure cold water. It is then separated and made ready for weaving.

The children toil from sunrise to sunset, knowing only wizened age from the very beginning. How could it be otherwise? They are dragged from the cradle to augment the meagre family coffers, to eke out a drab existence, until they become weak and emaciated, with sunken narrow chests, and with no joy in life until they die. Yet little boys haunt the carpet sheds, starving for want of the nightmare of twelve to sixteen hours a day which their fidgety work must mean. Many of them lose the best of

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their sight for life. It is one thing to protest against child labour, but another to stop it in a country where children are often unable to secure the bare necessities of life.

The carpet industry has now become a state monopoly, worked by the *Société des tapis de Teheran*, floated with a capital of thirty million *rials* (about three hundred thousand pounds). The object is to maintain quality and to control manufacture and export. No private individual will henceforward be permitted to dispose of his wares as he wishes.

CHAPTER XXIII

IRAN EMANCIPATES

HOWEVER pinched their faces, however poor they may appear, however little they seem to get out of life, Iranians are born with at least the innate ability to know what to do with their leisure. Nothing.

"Our story is like the sea," said Rumi. "The crest of the wave was ridden by many a tyrant as he overcame the lethargy and indolence of the peasants. When he vanished, the wave became like sand upon which the sun poured ceaseless scorn, sapping all vitality."

The achievement of rulers like Shah Abbas was the greater for the work they left to posterity. In much the same way Riza will earn his place in history. He puts efficiency above luxury. Even the members of Parliament have to clock in, or forfeit a tithe of their pay. He insists that the budget must be balanced each year. With practically no national debt, through oil revenue and agriculture, Iran has a real purchasing power, added to an ability and a will to barter. A recent budget balanced at about thirteen million pounds sterling, excluding the oil revenue which went to the army. All the hundred or more state monopolies gave a profit.

The balance sheet of the National Bank of Iran shows a large increase upon previous years in business and profits. In six years the total became eight times greater, while over three times as much money was placed upon fixed deposit, although a contemporary report on economic conditions stated that "at the present time the expenditure of the

Iranian Government for all purposes is definitely in excess of revenue from all known sources and the national reserve held abroad is low."

The interest of financiers in the new programme is sure sign of real progress. Railways, roads, and factories have made many calls upon the banks, and are clear evidence of permanent construction.

Probably for the first time, the police and the army are paid. Taxes are levied with a little gentle persuasion here and there. Many, collected if at all by Eastern methods, have been abolished. Instead, indirect ones touch the pocket of the man in the street, who delights to sip his sweet milkless tea. The tax is so heavy on tea and sugar that the poor wretches find even this simple pleasure denied them, save at a cost which puts the syrupy tea of their forefathers upon a plane of prohibited luxury. They are made to pay handsomely for their weakness, because sugar and tea are taxed almost out of sight at nearly a thousand per cent. of the cost at the port. One of the main drawbacks to the expansion programme is that the peasants are unable to purchase the quantities of tea and sugar they and the Shah would like. Thus Riza may, if he is not careful, cut his own throat.

Learning is taking the place of religion. In the last decade nearly eight times more money was spent on education than during the previous one. Three hundred thousand children attend the schools, where the syllabus includes French and English. Schoolboys howl even in Iran. In an English essay, one said that the days are longer in summer than they are in winter because heat expands everything, but that it did not matter to the British Empire, on which the sun never sets, because it is in the East and the sun sets in the West! Secondary school children study until they are nineteen, unlike their parents who would long before have been heavily married. Schools are being extended all over the country, and

enlarged to provide libraries, lectures on hygiene, and child welfare.

The Boy Scout movement flourishes, *amedeh bash* the "Be Prepared" motto. Physical culture has been introduced into the girls' schools, particularly for the Girl Guides, with the object of raising their bodily and moral prospects. There are two universities. The hundred or so students of both sexes sent abroad each year to England, America, and elsewhere, have begun to return; spending in the service of their government double the time they were abroad, at a salary depending upon their qualifications and degrees.

Riza emancipated the women by education rather than by royal decree. He invited diplomats and noblemen to a garden party, where they wore European dress. For the first time they brought their wives. Early in 1936 the Queen and her daughters, unveiled, paid several visits, both official and informal, when the Shah successfully appealed to the women of his country to follow the royal lead. Many were the irksome restrictions applied to those who resisted. They were not permitted to walk along certain shopping streets, nor to enter cinemas or other public buildings. Their husbands were not eligible to hold official appointments. Astute shopkeepers purchased large stocks of ladies' clothes to sell them at exorbitant prices. Ship-loads of women's hats poured into Iran in preparation for this feminine *coup d'état*.

Schoolgirls no longer peer at their fellows through black veils, as did their mothers, or vacillate and dash blindly across crowded streets. The royal decree has gone forth. Strong in his strength, Riza tackled the grandmothers, who gave fierce opposition, eager to protest when the more educated young women ventured abroad, eyes bright as they sought a brave new world.

Reforms went even deeper. The Department of Education recently requested particulars of lady teachers

related to government officials, the degree of such relationships, and what they taught!

Another matter of deep significance concerned the men. The cult of the Pahlevi cap had to be seen to be believed, for Riza twice conjured the impossible out of the hat. Some years ago he decreed that his citizens should wear a peaked affair, like a French *képi*, but taller, to be called by his family name. They did. It was. Bold move towards national discipline, it succeeded through the drive of petty officials, at last paid and anxious to please the new master. Everywhere reigned the Pahlevi cap, indoors and out, crowning the heads of all good citizens, even as their Shah himself was crowned. Prince and peasant, chauffeur and loafer, man and boy, wore the badge of the nation, day in, day out. The butler waited at table in one. He said good night and arrived the next morning still wearing it. Rumour has it that a European, soliciting the Shah for some concession or other, sought to curry favour by appearing before him in a Pahlevi cap, a gesture that was not appreciated.

Until 1935, cocked on one side and in all stages of dilapidation, the Pahlevi cap proclaimed good Iranians from pram to Paradise, from childhood to chatterbox. Black ones predominated, with deadmouse grey a good second. One thing against them was that although Moslems must cover their heads when at prayer, they may wear nothing to shade their eyes from the light of Heaven. During his daily devotions therefore, the Iranian Moslem was forced to find some other form of head covering, or to turn the nuisance back to front.

Discipline and unity at last assured, in the floral June setting of 1935 Iran took off her national cap to posterity. The Shah deemed his people ready for a more western policy, expressing the wish that European hats be worn. For those who had spent years learning to jam Pahlevis on thick unwilling heads, the shock was severe. But,

the nation behind him to a cap, no order was necessary. The royal wish was enough. An opportunist, a junior official in the Government, bought the entire stock of a local hat shop, to sell it all back a few hours later to the besieged proprietor at a handsome profit. Two felt hats proudly paced the Royal Square at Isfahan upon the opening day, cynosure of all eyes. The Governor of Kermanshah asked the British Consul to lend him a Homburg. Ours was stolen. Seventy thousand heads in Teheran alone changed hats that summer's morning.

So strong was local feeling at Meshed against the reform, that the police were forced to fire on the crowd, killing over a hundred people, which spread a wide respect for machine-guns. All this trouble was over a postman's hat made of cardboard and covered with cheap cloth, costing anything from eightpence to half a crown a time.

Since the demise of the Pahlevi cap, a wide variety has replaced it. All manner of people now wear all manner of hats: boaters, battered bowlers, black and grey top-hats, some cut to half the original height; and even ladies' confections resurrected from any and everywhere, including a child's straw bearing the ribbon of H.M.S. *Formidable*. Although the old—and some of them look very old—Pahlevi cap may persist among a few simple peasants living in the back of beyond, and unaware of the modern trend, a great event has passed, sure sign that this Middle-Eastern land is looking towards the West.

Having ruled that nationalism came first and religion second, Riza fettered the holy men to their correct sphere in modern life; the well-being of their flocks rather than the politics they had learned to sway. Some of the mosques have gone to the length of supplying chairs, and small wooden boxes wherein the worshipper may deposit his shoes. Report is strong that a new day of rest will soon be declared. One day in the week is necessary. Friday does

not accord with world affairs, as Turkey has found. A fashion is being set and followed in the Near East.

Undoubtedly the Shah has disciplined his country, and can afford more closely to approach Western culture. He is not the man to see his authority and the dignity of his race flouted by anyone, witness the recent steps he took to break off diplomatic relations with America because his minister was taken to the local police station for exceeding the speed limit. Much of the trouble was the fuss the press made, particularly among their humorous correspondents. To retaliate, the Shah imposed a heavy import duty on American cars. Many hundreds were quickly dumped at Iranian ports before the order took effect.

Roads are being made and maintained. They already cover nearly fifteen thousand miles, and are traversed each year by upwards of twenty thousand cars and lorries, carrying twelve million passengers. New bridges give security of tenure when winter rains groove the mountain slopes. Thousands find employment on these works alone. Railways, roads, factories, agriculture, and oil all make work; and the Shah brooks no refusal.

An air-line between Baghdad, Teheran, and Bushire is projected, later to be extended to other parts of the country, and to be manned by Iranian pilots flying British aircraft. A railway costing about twenty-five million pounds is being constructed by European engineers. Iran, larger than France and Germany put together, had, until 1921, practically no railways, although as long ago as 1891 one was projected from Mohammerah to Shushtar.

The purpose of the new line is to connect the Gulf with the Caspian, over a distance of nearly a thousand miles; linking Ahwaz, Sultanabad, Qum, and Teheran; but leaving vital centres like Tabriz, Hamadan, Isfahan, and Shiraz off the railway map. Critics say that twenty-five million pounds have been spent on a railway leading from

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the Shah's estates on the Caspian to his estates on the Gulf, from nowhere to nowhere, but not for nothing! Certainly the new line does not provide the missing link between India and Europe, which it might well have done had it been planned nearer to 'Iraq. It is too late to deplore that there is still no Iranian chain between West and East along the highway of the nations.

From the south at Bandar Shahpur, the line runs zigzag up the hill slopes, through a spiral tunnel four kilometres long, where more than forty kilometres of track cover but twelve of distance. Many severe problems faced the engineers, who had to overcome all manner of difficulties in the mountains. Climate and fever held up the work in the north. Heat was the chief bugbear in the south.

A German and an American firm secured the original contracts. These were cancelled when the Iranian Government took on the job themselves. In 1932 a Scandinavian firm guaranteed to complete the line within six years. The various contracts were taken up by Italians and a few Swedes and Czechs. A British firm laid the most difficult part of the track. Most of the technical work has been done by foreigners, for Iranians do not lend themselves readily to technical training. The steel rails came from Russia. The cement was largely obtained from the Iranian factory in Teheran, worked by Danish engineers. The rolling stock was ordered from America and Belgium. Some of the engines were made in England. A truly cosmopolitan venture.

By supplying work for thousands of Iranians, the construction of this railway has helped the Shah to keep some of his distant people quiet; for while there is work to be done, good money paid for doing it, and achievement to mark his efforts, the Iranian does not venture forth on his old quest for easy excitement.

The original conception was strategic. Riza being a soldier at heart, the thought in his mind probably was

that he needed a railway to compete with possible attack from Russia, or, at one time a Persian bogey, from Great Britain. After all, we did not hesitate to go into Persia during the war without so much as a "by your leave." A strategic railway should stand or fall upon military arguments. Looked at in plan, how can this one ever defend Iran? If Great Britain were sufficiently deluded to attempt an attack, so remote a possibility that it can be ruled out of court, she would scarcely choose the Persian Gulf by which to enter. There is a better jumping-off ground in 'Iraq. Besides, aeroplanes have put a different complexion on the problem. If Russia adopted an Imperialistic policy and tried to strike at or through Iran, concentration of Soviet aircraft could at once put this line out of action, until it became of use to her. The present railway is strategically hopeless.

As for the economic view, the route passes through few fertile centres. Heavy haulage charges add seriously to the cost of exports and imports. Besides, Iran needs much of her own produce to feed her people at home. The surplus has a natural outlet into Russia and Afghanistan, which are sufficiently remote from the world supply system to give her a ready market. Thus, even were the railway able to carry surplus crops to the Caspian and the Gulf, there would be little hope of reaching the ports at prices compatible with those ruling in the open market. It seems that the project is doomed economically as well as strategically.

Riza tried to pay for it out of income, for he does not want to be in financial debt to other countries, an ambitious and worthy aim. He levied a special tax on tea and sugar, which brought in nearly two million pounds a year, but this proved insufficient, so in 1935 Iran suffered a flight from the *rial*, and the Shah realized that he would be forced to liquidate his assets. This meant the sale of reserves of silver, a step which soon sent the *rial* down the drain.

There were other contributory causes. Government was seriously burdened with foreign currency, having speculated at the wrong moment, and being caught with too many foreign bonds on hand, and able to sell only at a serious loss. The joint result was that the *rial* fell from about fifty to a hundred to the pound sterling. To meet the new conditions the government before granting an import licence, insisted that merchants should pay for goods in foreign currency, at rates above those ruling in the open market. He thus got rid of some of his burden. But he severely upset the commerce of the country. The Shah then fixed a flat rate of eighty for all business. He ordered that imports must balance exports. Merchants, however much they might wish to import luxuries for the leisured classes, had to obtain a certificate from an export clearing house to enable goods to enter the country. Thus arose a new kind of middleman, who was able to oblige, at a certain figure of course.

The principal countries in order of trade are Soviet Russia, Great Britain, America, Germany, and Japan, with Japan's percentage increasing. The chief exports are oil, carpets, raw cotton, wool and skins, gum, rice, opium, and caviare, totalling about twenty-five million pounds a year. The principal imports are cotton goods, lorries and cars, sugar, tea, gold, and machinery, to the value of some ten millions. The tendency is to give monopolies in all trades, forming joint-stock companies and trusts.

To bring true perspective upon Riza's achievement, we must realize that only a few years ago what little petrol, nay, what little oil there was, arrived at Teheran on the backs of camels and donkeys, as it still does in the more remote parts.

Since 1930 British mineral oils have superseded those from Russia, and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company has extended its activities, providing new pipes, buildings, and

tanker lorries painted in the Iranian national colours of red, green, and white.

The extent of Russia's present interest in Iran is reflected by the many contracts she has received to build flour mills and bakeries, granaries, power stations, and workshops. The Soviet recently signed a trade treaty ensuring that the value of goods changing hands required no money to pass. Trade between the two countries is about the equivalent of five million pounds a year, or forty per cent. of Iran's imports, and nearly twelve per cent. of that of the U.S.S.R. The chief effects of the treaty are that the amount of iron, steel, and machinery exported from the Soviet will be greater than before, as will the number of Russians employed to maintain it. In return, Iran sends wool, leather, and cotton to Russia, as well as fish and caviare.

Iran has also signed a trade agreement with Germany, fixing the annual value of the trade between them at the astonishing figure of nearly three million pounds. Germany is to provide electrical and textile machinery, motor vehicles, cement, and house furnishings. Iran sends cotton, silver and gold, rice, caviare which goes by air to be prepared in Bavaria, and skins. Iran provides neither Russia nor Germany with oil. That goes to Great Britain. Exports to Britain, oil excepted, total under a million pounds and include carpets, skins, furs, dried fruits, and gum.

Riza must be given credit for appreciating that this is a machine age, and that aeroplanes, light and power stations, oil wells, pipe lines, mines, and machines generally are most likely to help his country forward. The fact that the Iranian is unable to appreciate that the purchase of the machine is only the beginning of his problem, and that he has to be educated and disciplined in its use and maintenance, is a matter perhaps grasped by the Shah, but not yet by his peasants. The Iranian Air Force, as an example, although possessing well over a hundred first-line aircraft,

would have difficulty to send a squadron a-bombing, for the pilots are ill-practised, and insufficiently trained. The air force is almost entirely equipped with British aircraft: first-line Hawker aeroplanes, and de Havilland training types. They are basing a squadron and flying training schools at Ahwaz and at Meshed, and have as many as eighty pilots under training at a time.

The Shah has his own aeroplane factory, where he builds both Hawker and de Havilland machines under licence. The air force is part of the army, which numbers roughly a hundred thousand men, of which a third are garrisoned at Teheran.

Two merchant fleets are contemplated, one to ply down the Gulf, and one in the Caspian from Nou Shah, formerly called Haribabad, which is being made into an up-to-date port, technically supervised by Dutch engineers.

The craze for modern machinery adds to the plight of the peasants, ground under the heel of a despot who, looked at dispassionately, whatever posterity may say of the fine work he is doing for the country at large, will have to answer the charge that he is inconsiderate to the great majority of his people. They have no means of expressing their feelings, nor of altering their state for better or for worse, so tight is the grip of the police system.

Every factory is to have a sports club, equipped for tennis and "footaba," for which the modern Iranian has a growing fancy.

A race meeting was recently held in Ahwaz under the Shah's patronage. His idea was to promote the breeding and ownership of better chargers among the garrison. The British community from Abadan were invited to enter horses, which swept the board. They came in first and second in every race. Cash prizes were handed out on the spot by the governor, quite substantial sums too, the smallest first prize being over twenty pounds. As the winners stepped off the dais after receiving their purses,

the local income tax collector collared them, and extracted four per cent. on the spot!

To give Iran some respite from the large sums of money she is forced to send abroad, factories are beginning to produce sugar, beer, soap, shoes, and stockings. Thus the buying power of the people is slowly being raised, enabling them to purchase more commodities at lower prices. At the same time the Shah will have more up his international sleeve. Cotton is another new industry, which has grown from comparatively nothing to nearly forty thousand spindles. One of the largest mills at Chahi, employing over a thousand workers, belongs to the Shah and is run on military lines, providing the cloth for the army. Iran has good prospect of trade in tea and cotton. Not only should she be able ultimately to supply her own needs, she bids fair to exchange her surplus crops with Russia and Afghanistan. These markets will further add to her power of barter, enabling her to purchase more machinery, and to pay for technical labour.

What about business? A substantial margin yet remains within the limits laid down by recent agreements. Those who would trade with her must keep in close and constant touch with her markets, ensuring that the wares they sell are brought to the notice of those in the position to purchase them.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE KNEES OF THE GODS

UNDER Cyrus, the Persian empire followed hot on the heels of the downfall of Assyria and Babylonia. Two centuries later, when no one ruled strongly anywhere, Alexander grasped his opportunity. Rome, built upon roads, fell when the centurions led their armies farther abroad. Space defeated time. Persia was the by-pass to the East. The next great power, that of Islam, was founded by forces stronger than force itself; nourished by religious fervour during an era of general collapse. Then came the Asiatic empires of Genghis Khan and Timurlane, founded upon the mobility of virile nomads. Away in the West, Great Britain began to awaken from her slumber.

In the nineteenth century, and at the dawn of the twentieth, Persia, ever a pawn on the chess-board of nations, was fair political game. Because of the weakness and indolence of her statesmen, she had endured a long period of stagnation, which bore fruit during the years of the Great War, when Russia and Britain considered that they both had the right to protect her.

There is vague report that the warlike Lurs and the Bakhtiari, among others, are revolting against the Shah, under the leadership of a member of the house of Kojar—that of the deposed Shah. Riza's methods; his reforms in defiance of the vested religious autocracy, fanatically Shi'a at heart; and the capacity for internal strife inherent in the

virile peoples of these parts, at any moment are like to create a problem of serious import to the present security and prospect of the country.

Harking back to pre-war years, Russia can scarcely avoid criticism. Nor can Great Britain, although she at least washed her hands in public. Russia resorted to all manner of methods to gain undue influence. Some of her ways were dubious to say the least of it. She financed the Shah for her own ends, and openly corrupted his court. An example of her method came to light when two Georgians assassinated a Cabinet Minister in Teheran. Russia refused trial in the Persian courts.

Great wars still have their origin in or because of small states.

Iran is a buffer between Russia and India. Were Russia to thrust a wedge into the Persian Gulf, she would not only have access to India, but to a warm sea.

An ancient boast of Persia was that her boundaries were neither rivers nor imaginary lines, but seas and impregnable mountains. Although true of the past, the advent of the air has dispelled false security on that score. Trade forces Iran to accede to external influence, however much she may wish otherwise. The key lies with the U.S.S.R., which absorbs nearly half her export trade. Who can forsake their daily bread and scrape?

The influence of Communism, however unconscious, upon the Iranian peasantry, may be considered negligible. The reason is not far to seek. Under the system whereby they are ruled, with little voice in their government, the peasants cannot be whipped into action save by the Shah himself. Because of the complete absence of the *vox populi*, were Russia to dominate the Shah, she would be able to overrun Iran with little difficulty; but if Japan gains a firmer foothold on the mainland, she and Russia may have a few words to say to each other over the bodies lying between them.

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Is it significant that Great Britain is taking a more acute interest in the affairs of the Gulf? Strengthening her position on the Arabian shore, she moved her naval base from Qishm Island to Bahrein.

A pact of non-aggression has been initiated between Iran, 'Iraq, and Turkey. Coupled with the present trade agreements it would seem that important vested interests are being forged in Asia.

The outstanding problem between 'Iraq and Iran is the vexed Shatt-al-Arab question, complicated by Iran's claim, through usage, to keep her ships in the channel. This right of way has never been seriously challenged and rests upon a precedent long since created. Although the boundary gives 'Iraq disputed control, the frontier concedes the navigable rights of the river to Iran. It is scarcely surprising that the Iranian Government recently objected to the inconvenience of this anomaly, representing that the frontier should be marked along the centre of the river, which, they claim, is customary. But the alteration would seriously affect vested shipping interests.

The problem arose in the middle of last century when Turkey controlled the Shatt, the high-water line on the left bank being Persian territory. At the treaty of Erzerum in 1847, followed by the protocol of Constantinople in 1913, an international commission decided the boundary in the presence of delegates from both countries, and recognized the right of Persian ships to navigate the river. At the end of the Great War the new kingdom of 'Iraq accepted the Turkish boundaries, which included the navigable waters of the Shatt-al-Arab.

Since 1932, however, the Iranian Government has infringed the treaty by establishing police posts in 'Iraqi territory, and by transgressing the rules and rights of 'Iraq on the river, defending her action by declaring treaty and protocol invalid, contending that the frontier was

never properly defined. 'Iraq asked that the matter be referred to the Permanent Court of International Justice at the Hague, a step opposed by Iran for obvious reasons.

The present situation sees Iran happy to negotiate until the cows come home, with 'Iraq seeking to confirm her legal rights. Eastern politics take a long time to mature.

Under the treaty of Erzerum Iran has long used the waterway unquestioned. Her navy rides in the Karun river where it joins the Shatt at Khorram-Shahr. Although she tacitly admits she has little to grumble at, as the law stands, by custom she considers that her rights in these waters have been recognized for so long that the time has come to put them on a proper footing. She does not like her tenure to be patently insecure, and resents the thought that she is conducting much of her sea business at the mercy of 'Iraq. The case for Iran was well put by her minister in London. He urged that she had always protested her claim for the boundary between the two states to be in the centre of the river. Therefore she does not propose to accede to 'Iraq's request that the matter be referred to a court of international law.

The 'Iraqi picture is every bit as vivid. She has no seaboard. The Shatt is her only outlet to the Persian Gulf. Iran for hundreds of miles borders the Gulf, to no part of which 'Iraq has ever made claim, pointing out that her only port, Basrah, is not even upon the sea, but thirty miles up-river; and that while the Shatt is hers by international law she will share it with nobody, although she has given ample proof of her readiness to co-operate within the technical terms of navigable rights and rules.

Iran took upon herself to prove to the League of Nations, of which she has been a member since its inception, that the legal position upon which 'Iraq based her case is open

to question. This argument runs that although the Persian Government of the past accepted the treaty of Erzerum and the protocol, her parliament did not ratify the right of Turkey to discuss the matter. To meet the situation an international court was proposed by Italy, of all people; but neither 'Iraq nor Iran fell for the idea, 'Iraq harping upon her legal position, Iran pleading right of custom.

If we take the common-sense view, despite the vagaries of diplomats and their treaties, a boundary naturally follows the centre of a line of hills or the middle of a river. A compromise is possible. Why not sell the water to a private company, like the Suez Canal?

As another solution, Iran could open up the Bahmashir river and divert all her shipping from the Shatt. But the heavy cost, and the time and experience necessary before so vast an undertaking could be effective, would certainly count against the project.

The Shah is not the man to stop at trifles.

The country's internal problems are capable of solution, and are at least in the hands of a man with the will to make as much as anyone of his resources. Without national debt, exports and imports balanced, luxuries taxed almost out of sight, and the people disciplined to endure a standard of living we can scarcely contemplate, Iran has a future while Riza sits upright upon the throne. Knock him off, or let him fall off when he grows older, and the crash will come. That is the price of dictatorship. Fortunately his son, educated in Switzerland, shows promise. It seems to please the Riza Shah to train him for kingship.

Lady Ravensdale, "the very handsome offspring of one who was England's great and eminent orator and statesman," as His Excellency the Iranian Minister in London described her and her illustrious father, Lord Curzon, read a most interesting paper before the distin-

guished Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society in May, 1936. She ended with the following words which the authors of this small book commend to all who have the best interests of Iran in their minds:

“May I end by saying that I hold for Persia the warmth in my heart my father held for her. She has bewitched me with her enchantment, with the blue tiles of her mosques, the burnt sienna and rose madder of her mountains tipped with snow. I want to see her make good in her new and great experiment as one of the noblest countries of the world from whom we can all learn something.”

Happy-go-lucky Iran.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

WAYS AND MEANS

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step."
Japanese Proverb.

It is natural to presume that he who is bent on travel in Iran has the wish or the need to be reasonably economical. A glance at the map does not help much. Distances are great. Historical places are far apart. At the outset the traveller is forced to decide what he must eliminate, rather than what he includes in the time at his disposal. Motoring two or three hundred miles every day for a fortnight or three weeks will not enable him to see everything, even superficially. At best, he can only hope to visit the more important sites. The itinerary suggested is one which provides for two main alternatives: to spend anything from a fortnight to a month. Parentheses denote the longer prospect.

1. (1) Bushire to Shiraz (178 miles of hard going.
Takes about ten hours' driving).
- (2) At Shiraz.
2. (3) Shiraz to Persepolis (61 miles in all. About two
to Shiraz hours' driving each way).
3. (4) Shiraz to Isfahan (308 miles, past Persepolis
again, over a straight and dull road. About twelve
hours' driving).
4. } (5, 6, 7, 8) At Isfahan.
5. }
6. (9) Isfahan to Teheran (252 miles of well-graded
but bumpy going. About nine hours' driving).

APPENDIX—WAYS AND MEANS

7. } (10) At Teheran.
8. } (11) Teheran to Zindjan (202 miles over fair roads.
About nine hours' driving).
- (12) Zindjan to Tabriz (189 miles over good roads.
About seven hours' driving).
- (13) At Tabriz.
- (14) Tabriz to Kazvin (299 miles of good roads.
About four hours' driving).
- (15) Kazvin to Teheran (92 miles of bad roads.
About four hours' driving).
- (16) At Teheran.
9. (17) Teheran to Chalus (132 miles over a mountain
pass and through the
Chalus Gorge. About
eight hours' driving).
10. (18) Chalus to Ab-i-garm (103 miles of good road.
to Chalus About three hours' driving).
11. (19) Chalus to Teheran (132 miles).
12. (20) At Teheran.
- (21) Teheran to Shahrud (253 miles, over bad roads.
About ten hours' driving).
- (22) Shahrud to Meshed. (319 miles over bad roads.
About twelve hours' driving).
- (23) At Meshed.
- (24) Meshed to Shahrud (319 miles).
- (25) Shadrud to Teheran (253 miles).
- (26, 27) At Teheran.
13. (28) Teheran to Sultana- (177 miles, over a fair road.
bad About six hours' driving).
14. (29) Sultanabad to Ker- (196 miles over good roads.
manshah About seven hours' driving).
15. (30) Kermanshah to (224 miles of fair going over
Baghdad the Pa-i-taq Pass. About
ten hours' driving).

There are many points to be settled before starting. Money is the first essential. Arrange credits of at least fifty pounds sterling with the Imperial Bank of Iran at Isfahan and Teheran; and, if you wish, at Bushire, Shiraz,

Kermanshah, and Sultanabad. In addition, take the equivalent of thirty pounds sterling in Iranian currency.

The next important point is the conveyance. There is but one way, by car. Incidentally, it is better to hire, with an Iranian driver who knows road and language, than to attempt the journey in your own car, for many of the roads are really bad. Further, Iranian drivers are good, and have the *entrée* into village and town. Obviously it is cheaper to go as a party of, say, three. Car and driver cost about sixpence a mile to hire on tour if you travel lightly. It is as well to ensure, through personal inspection, that the driver carries spare springs, and that his tools are adequate, or you may find yourself stranded a hundred miles from the nearest village, and goodness knows how far from civilization. If you take your own car, a permit and a *carnet de passage en douane* are necessary, to avoid trouble with the customs.

There is one tip worth more than any other. Obtain from an Iranian Minister as official looking a letter as possible, with a large crest upon the envelope. You have no idea of the trouble it will save. Passports must have visas, and should be kept with the crested letter for ready access at the many villages where the officials deem it their business to stop you.

A recently dated vaccination certificate should be carried, lest an enthusiastic and inexperienced Iranian doctor seek to dig his needle into you, and to take his time over it. Further, ask the Iranian Legation whether plague, cholera, or typhus are prevalent.

Anyone contemplating a long itinerary should take his own bedding, because in out-of-the-way places cleanliness is not all it might be. Three blankets are essential, except for the hot months of June and July. A bathing suit, a packet of bromo, a thermos, and food and water enough for several days in case of a breakdown, are also desirable. Take flasks of your own drinks with you,

because alcohol is expensive. Gin and whisky cost about thirty shillings a bottle. There are many compensations for discomfort. Iranian beer, you will be pleased to hear, is particularly good, and the *vin du pays* quite drinkable. If hard put to it for food, remember that sour milk made into a kind of yaghourt is germ-proof.

You are recommended to carry light literature, and to include a travel book telling you what to see, and something about it when you get there. Not many people are privileged, even to-day, to tour Iran, which has ancient interest a-plenty. Read the "Hajji Baba" books, by James Morier; "The Valleys of the Assassins," by Freya Stark; and "A Persian Journey," by Fred Richards, who not only writes of, but draws the country. More serious books are "Persia," by the Hon. George Curzon; "A Year among the Persians," by Browne; and the abridged edition of "A History of Persia," by Sir Percy Sykes. These are enough for the average person.

Pack a dinner jacket and a lounge suit, with a dozen shirts and twelve pairs of socks. During long days of motoring you are recommended to wear an old pair of grey flannel trousers and comfortable shoes. Carry several scarves and sweaters to combat irregular temperatures.

When you arrive at an important town like Teheran or Isfahan you must report your advent to the police, for you are dependent upon their goodwill. They have every right to know of your arrival. If a customs official or a policeman keeps your car waiting an hour or two, or allows it to go on after reading the passports upside down, retain your sense of proportion. Be content that you have been allowed to proceed. You must of course stop when the police tell you to.

You will meet thousands of beggars. Sad though their plight may be, give them no money. If you do, you will never get rid of them and their many friends, who will descend upon you in shoals, for poverty is desperate, and a

tragedy that cannot be lightened by charity on your part.

One important point. Be sure your frame of mind is such that you will not easily be disappointed, nor lose your temper. A thousand discomforts and annoyances will beset you during the cross-country journeys, which offer a scenery that tends to lose its charm as the day rolls slowly by. A contented frame of mind is not only advisable, it is essential if you are to enjoy the tour.

Prices depend upon the rate of exchange. You will have to pay about twenty-three *rials* for a four-gallon tin of petrol, while your food will cost you anything from ten to twenty *rials* a day, although many hotels charge forty to fifty for full board. With the rate of exchange about eighty to the pound sterling, you have an idea of what this means. The hotels for the most part are insanitary.

If you wish to buy presents, you can scarcely do better than choose them at Isfahan, where the work of the miniature painters is world renowned. Hand-painted bracelets, of bone or mother-o'-pearl, are particularly pleasing, and range from ten to sixty *rials* each. Cigarette boxes cost anything from six to a hundred *rials*. The wares of the best artists are worth higher sums. Moreover, at Isfahan there is a permanent exhibition of arts and crafts where fixed prices are charged. Thus you can not only buy there, but also form an idea of comparative values. Incidentally, *vide* a recent edict, you are not allowed to take out of the country goods to the value of more than two hundred *rials* without an export permit.

The months of May and June are the best time to go, for the whole countryside is carpeted with wild flowers, stretching for miles in a riot of waving colour, where

“The ready damsels straight obey,
And seek the traveller where he lay.
‘Arise, fair youth, the wine cup waits,
And roses bloom within our gates.’”—*Firdausi*.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

(Only the more important events and names are included)

LEGENDARY

B.C.	B.C.	
4000 to	546	Unknown kings
		Keromarz, the Adam of Zoroaster
		Husang
		Tahmurz
		Jamshid
		Zohak
		Feridoun
		Manuchahr
		Zal
		Rustam
		Ker Kobad
		Kee Kaus
		} Fabled among others

HISTORICAL

B.C.	
546-529	Astyages
	Cyrus the Great (killed in battle)
	Defeat of Croesus
538	Surrender of Babylon
529-521	Cambyses (committed suicide)
521	Gaumata (assassinated)
521-485	Darius the First
512	Darius marched on India
490	Battle of Marathon
485-466	Xerxes (assassinated)
481	March against Greece

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

B.C.	
480	Thermopylæ Pass defended Naval battle of Salamis
479	Battles of Plataea Battle of Mycale
466-425	Artaxerxes
425	Xerxes the Second (murdered) Darius the Second Cyrus the Younger
404-358	Artaxerxes the Second
358-336	Artaxerxes the Third (murdered)
336-331	Darius the Third (murdered) Rise of Alexander
333	Battle of Issus
332	Siege of Tyre Egypt annexed by Alexander
331	Battle of Arbela Capture of Babylon and Persepolis
328	Alexander crossed the Hindu Kush
327	Alexander invaded India
325	Alexander returned to Suza
323	Death of Alexander
248	The Arsacid Dynasty (Parthian)

A.D.	
229-240	Ardeshir (Sassanian)
240-271	Shapur the First (killed in battle)
309-363	Shapur the Second
379-383	Ardeshir the Second (deposed)
383-388	Shapur the Third
420-440	Bahram Gur (assassinated)
503	Final battles against White Huns
570	Birth of Muhammad
590-628	Khosroe the Second (murdered)
632	Death of Muhammad
633	Rise of Islam in Persia
636	Sassanians routed near Kufah
637	Islam took Ctesiphon

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

A.D.	
1037	Seljuk Dynasty
1072-1092	Malik Shah
1090	Hassan captured Alamut
	Assassins established
1175-1227	Genghis Khan
1227-1241	Otogai
1251	Hulagu
1256	End of Assassins
1258	Sack of Baghdad by Hulagu
	End of Caliphate
1271	Marco Polo visited Persia
1353	Birth of Timurlane
1393	Siege of Tekrit
1394	Timurlane attacked Russia
1398	Timurlane invaded India
1401	Sack of Damascus and Aleppo
1402	Defeat of Bayazid
1405	Death of Timurlane
1499-1524	Ismail founded Safavi Dynasty
1587-1629	Shah Abbas the Great
1598	Sir Anthony Shirley arrived in Persia
1694-1722	Shah Husein (murdered)
1722	Invasion by Afghans under Mahmoud
1725	Shah Ashraf (murdered)
1727-1732	Shah Tahmasp (dethroned)
1736-1747	Nadir Shah (assassinated)
1738	Nadir Shah invaded India
	Kajar Dynasty founded
1796-1817	Agha Muhammad Khan (assassinated)
1797-1834	Feth Ali Shah
1800	Sir John Malcolm's first Mission to Persia
1848-1896	Nasir-ud-Din Shah
1889	Nasir-ud-Din Shah visited England
1902	Muzaffar-ud-Din Shah visited England
1906	Constitution granted
1926	Riza Shah crowned

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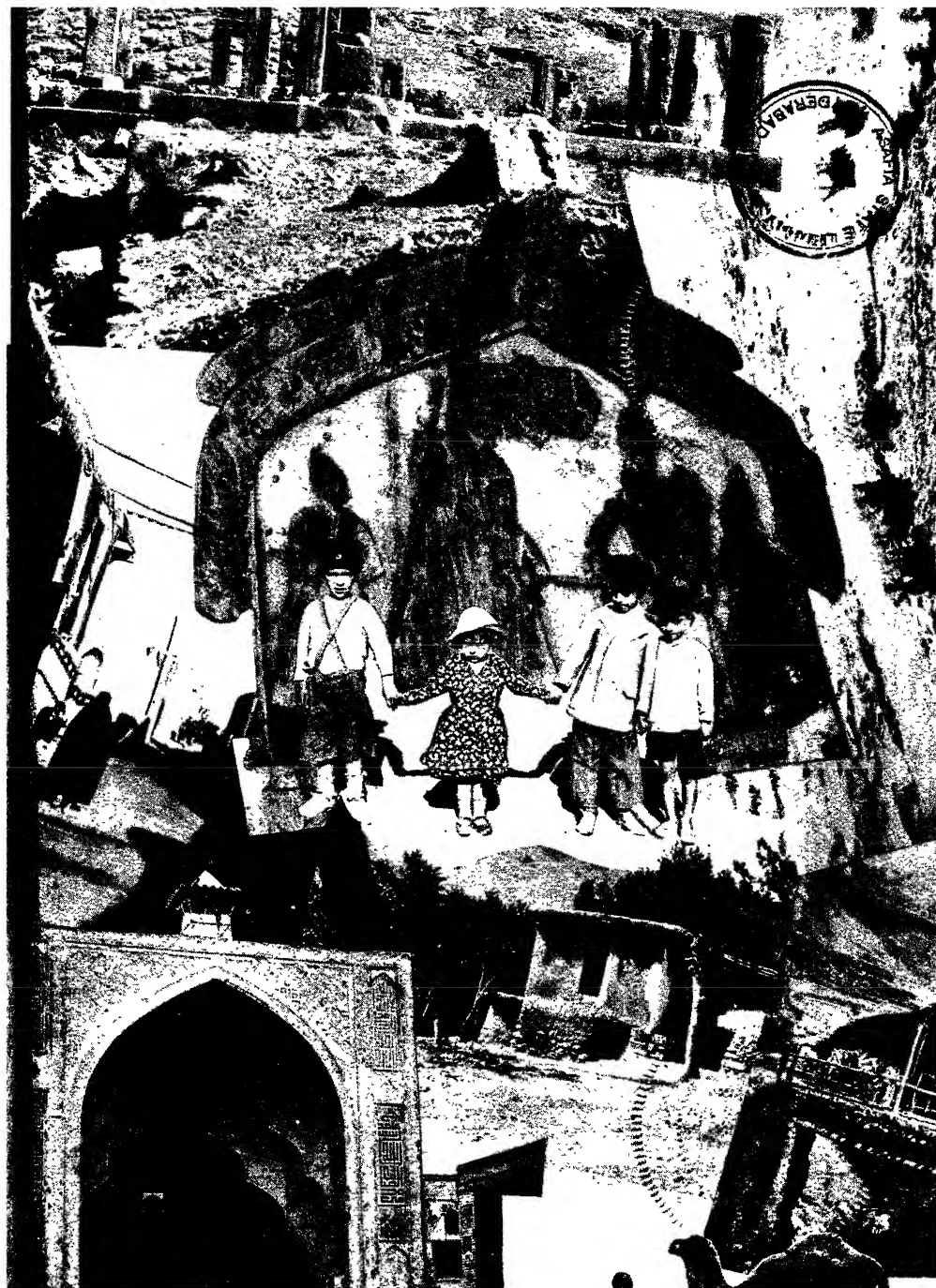
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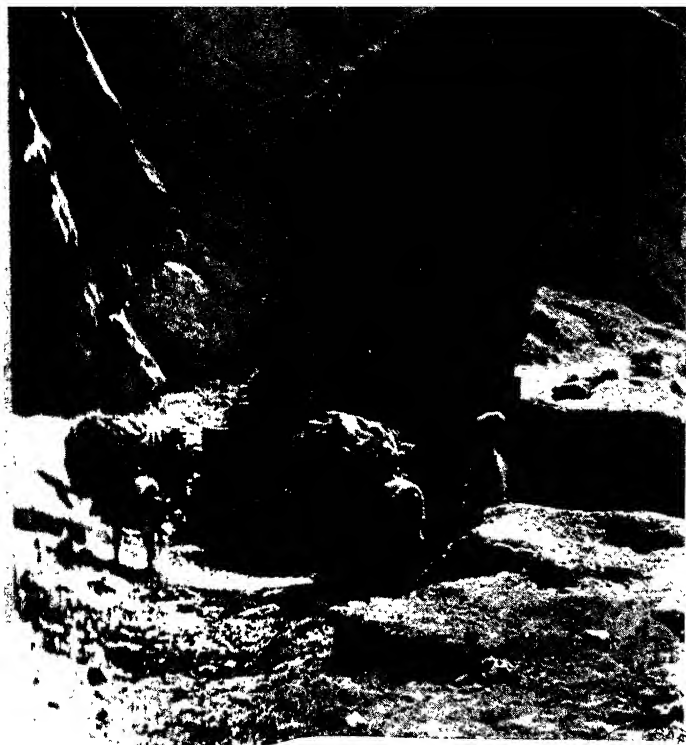
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*"An archway, jagged
and broken, crowned
nothing more than a
rubble of smashed
bricks" (p. 15)*

Corn mills of old Iran



"A ruined fountain on the Pa-i-tak Pass, dating probably from the time of Shah Abbas, although some say the arch is Alexandrian" (p. 18)



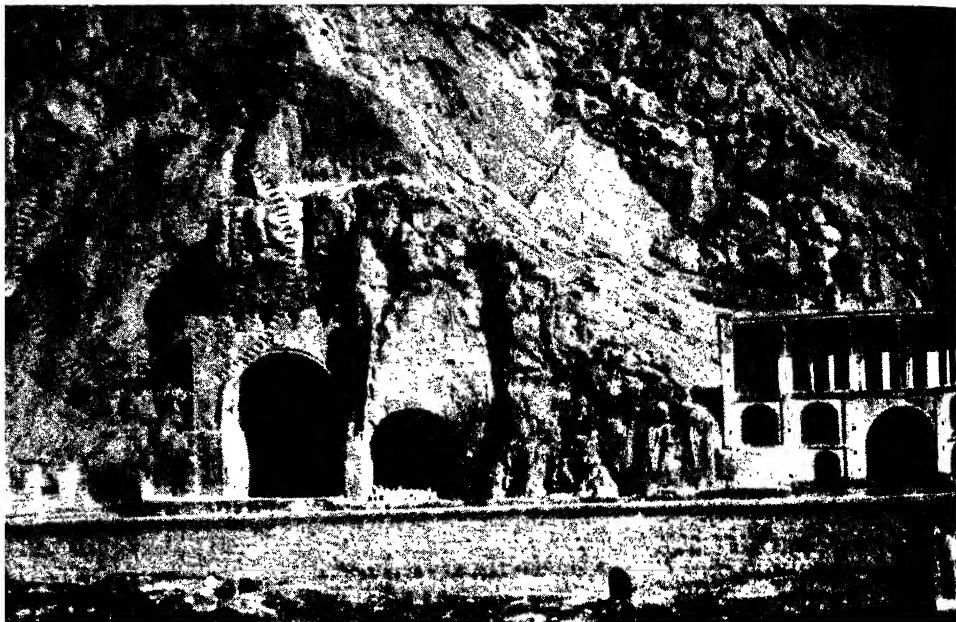
"The road reeked of petrol trickling from the tank. The driver was smoking" (p. 18)

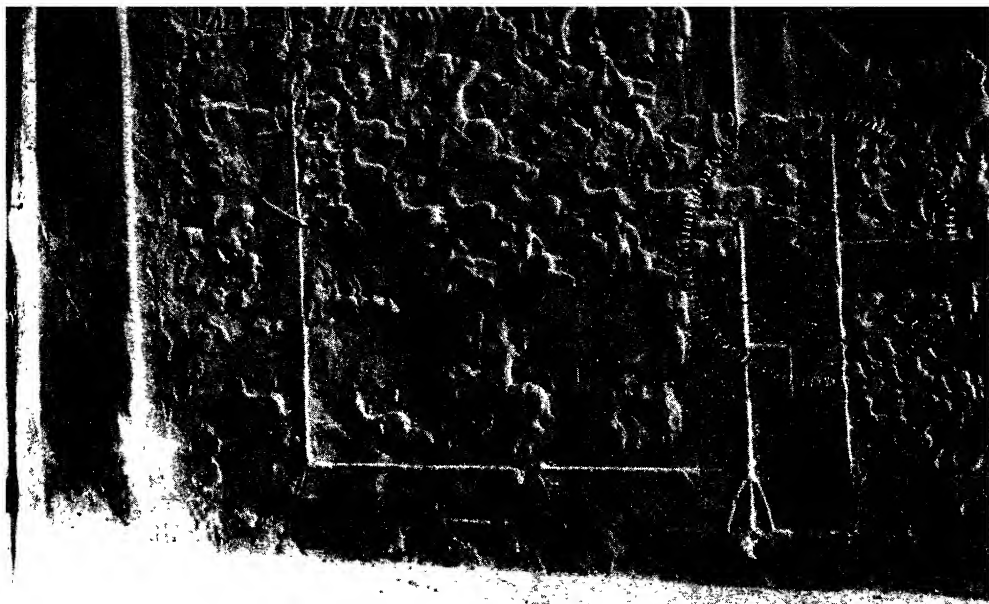




"Angels clad in Grecian draperies and clasping garlands framed the main archway, pillars richly embossed with flowers" (p. 24)

"Some of the finest rock carvings in the world, in sculptured caves in the face of the mountain" (p. 23)

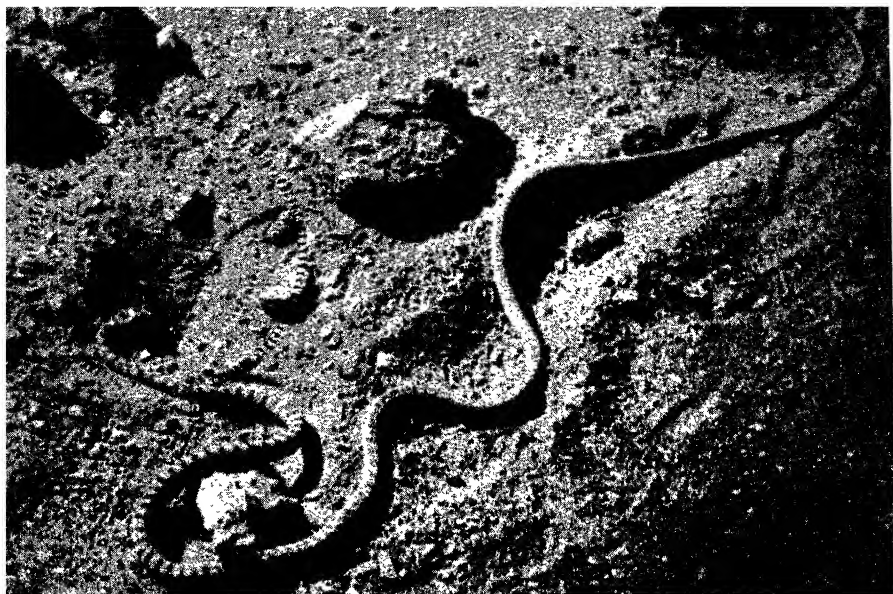




*"Each side of the
recess is decorated
... with record of the
chase" (p. 25)*



*Hamadan. "Like
many another city,
dreaming away in
peaceful solitude, she*



"A snake wound swiftly away" (p. 50)

"A stork flew overhead, to stand proudly on one leg upon its nest" (p. 50)



"Cleft

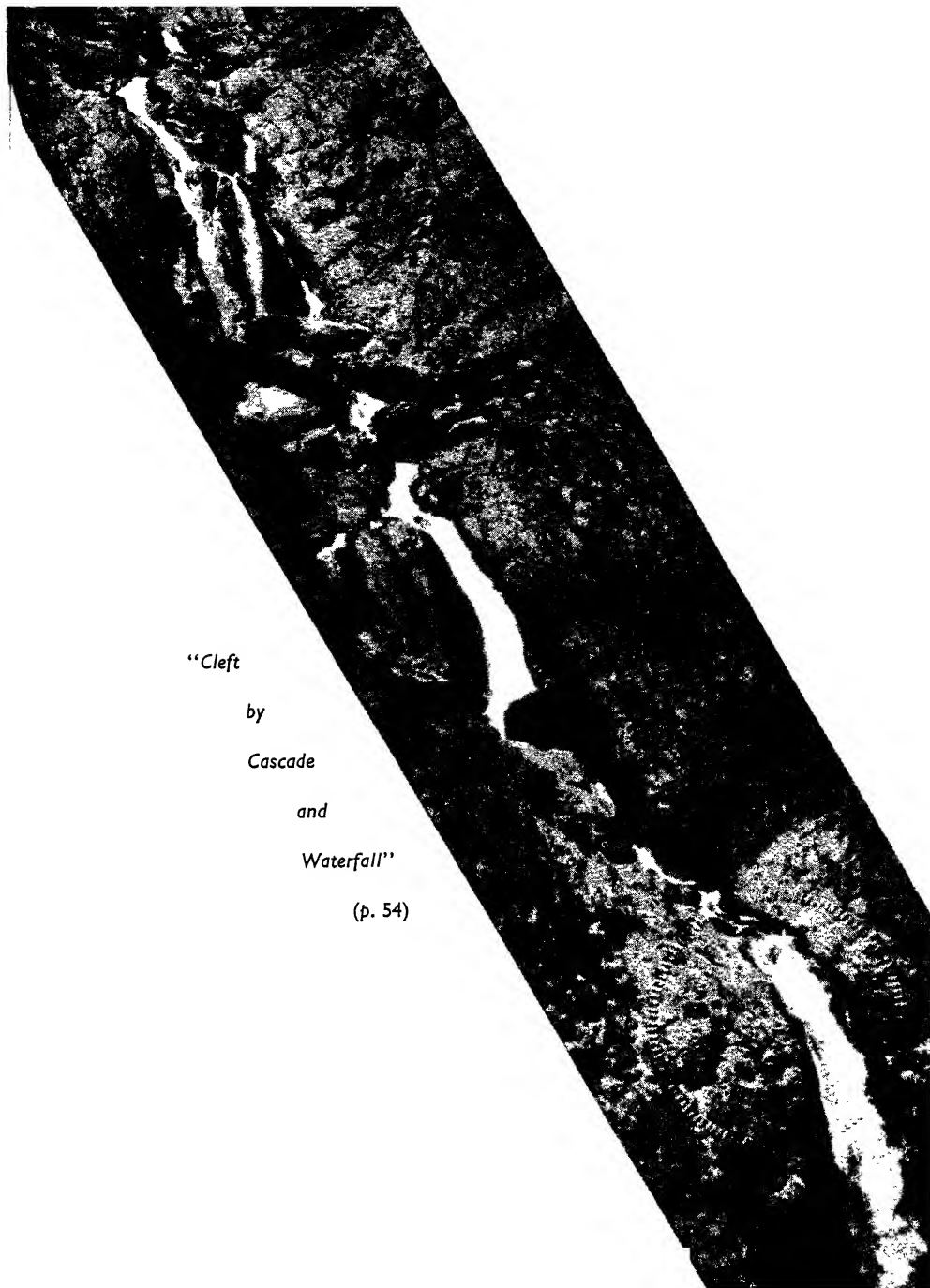
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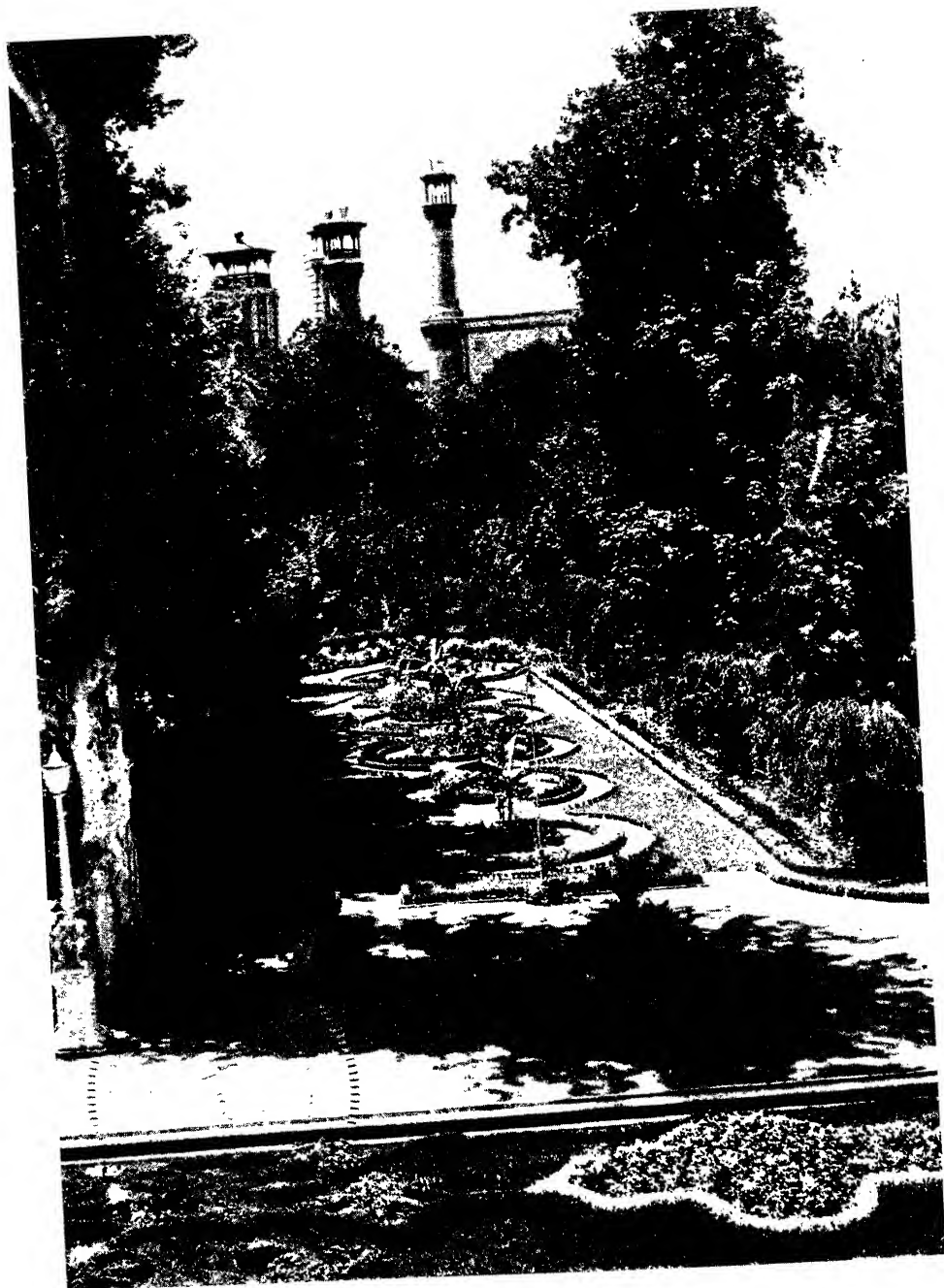
Cascade

and

Waterfall"

(p. 54)



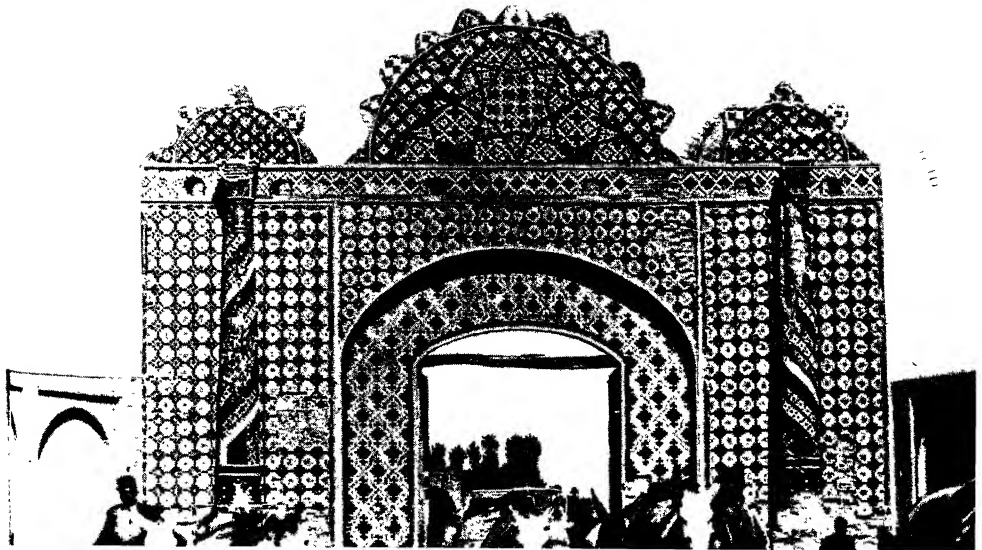


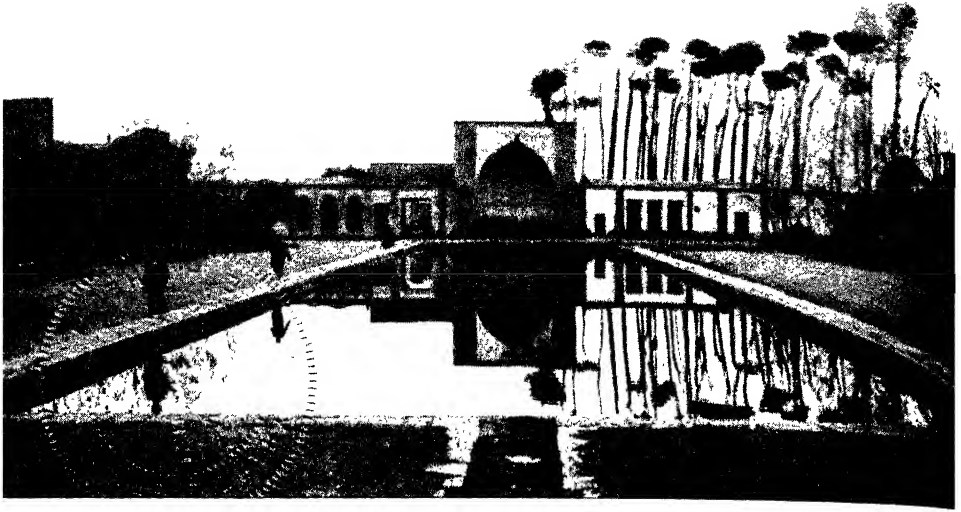
The garden of the new House of Parliament at Teheran. In the background stand



"We strolled in the orchard among cherry trees" (p. 56)

One of the gates of the city of the Shadow of God, Teheran (p. 55)





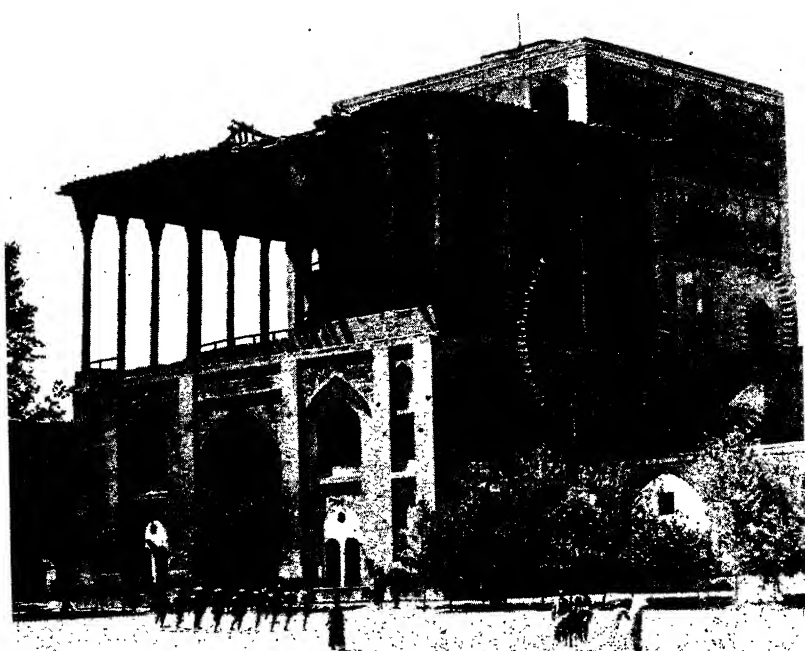
"A delicate blue loggia shaped like a single lotus petal" (p. 69)

The pool reflected the pillars standing before us, conjuring the forty of repute." The Hall of Forty Pillars (p. 68)



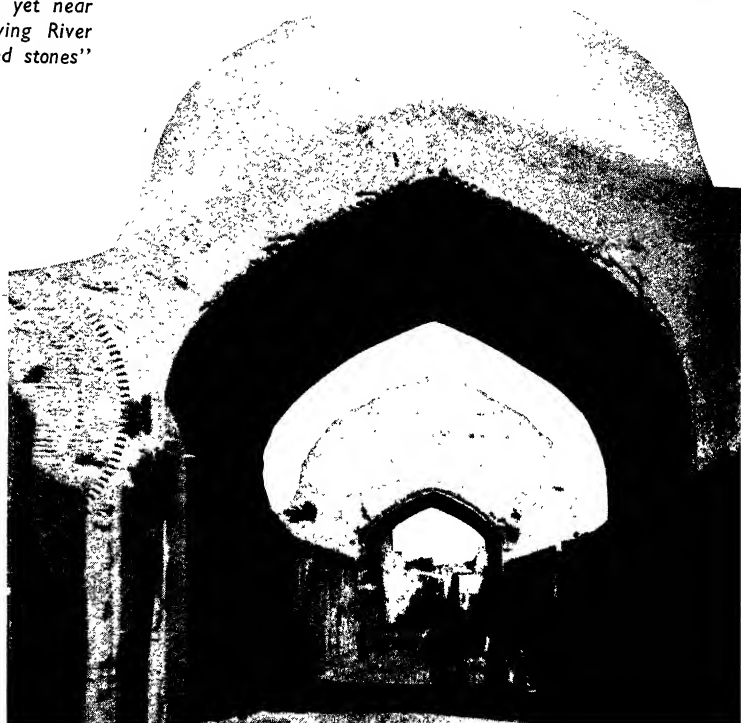


"High loggias decorated with faded pictures" (p. 69)

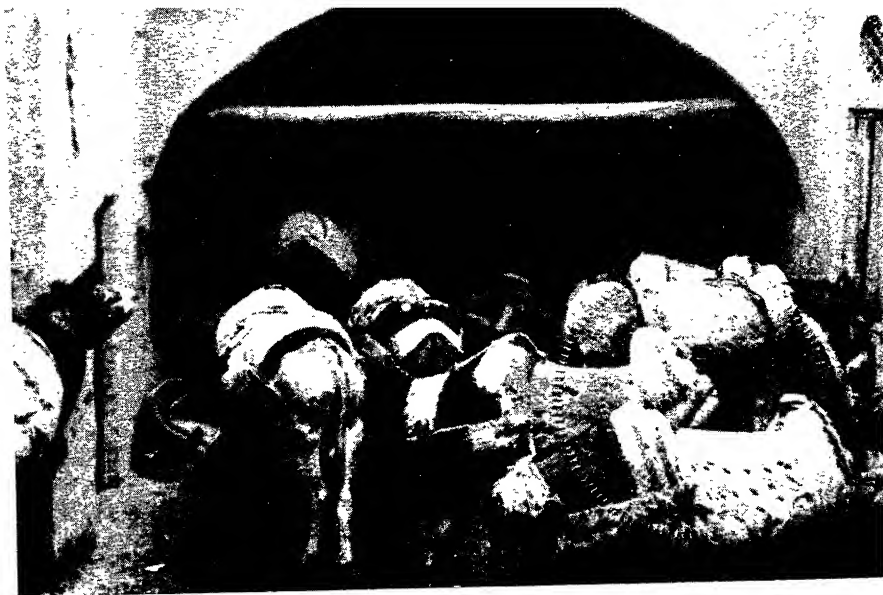




*Isfahan. "A romantic lane, an
avenue of shaded trees, remote from
the bustle of the town, yet near
enough to hear the Living River
trampling over the rounded stones"*
(p. 91)



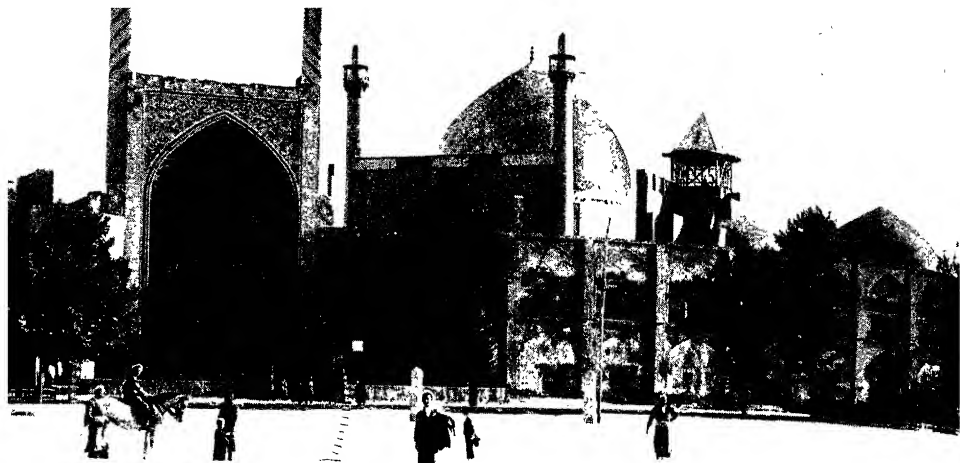
*the Painters' bazaar
at Isfahan (p. 78)*



"In a donkey serai, the hard-worked little beasts enjoyed a brief and well-earned rest" (p.

"Bread, sprinkled with caraway seeds, and rolled with swift surety into thin disks" (p. 82

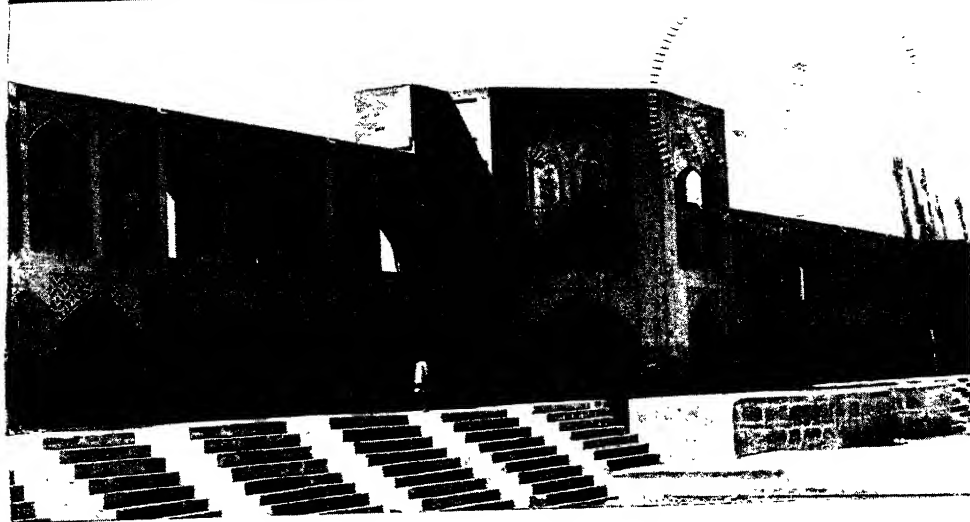




*"The King's Mosque
... The great door-
way, tiled in tur-
quoise, lapis-lazuli,
green, and yellow,
rose from squat inset
pillars of carved Yazd
alabaster" (p. 87)*



*"The Avenue of the
Four Gardens, broad
with the beauty of
silver poplars and
chenar trees nurtured
by running streams"
(p. 88)*





"The Mullah's niche"
(p. 85)

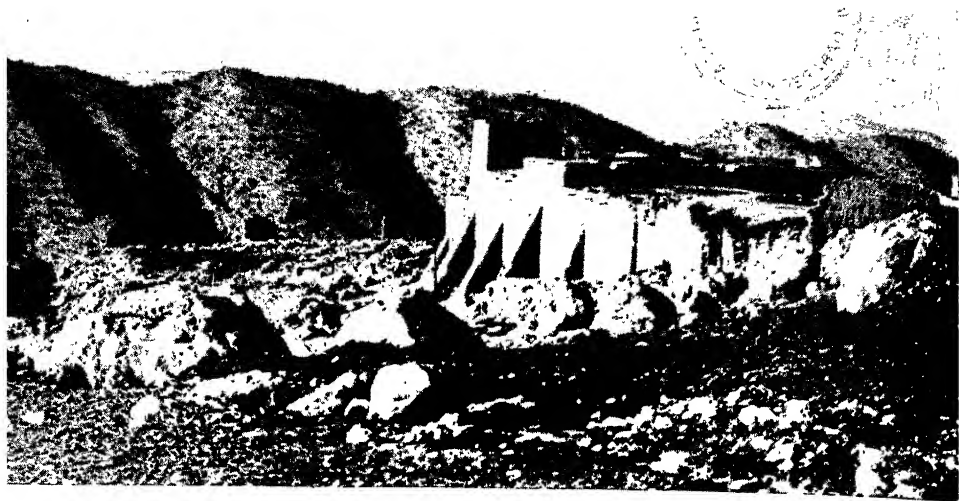


*"Mahelas, from which
she took aboard sacks
of grain"* (p. 112)

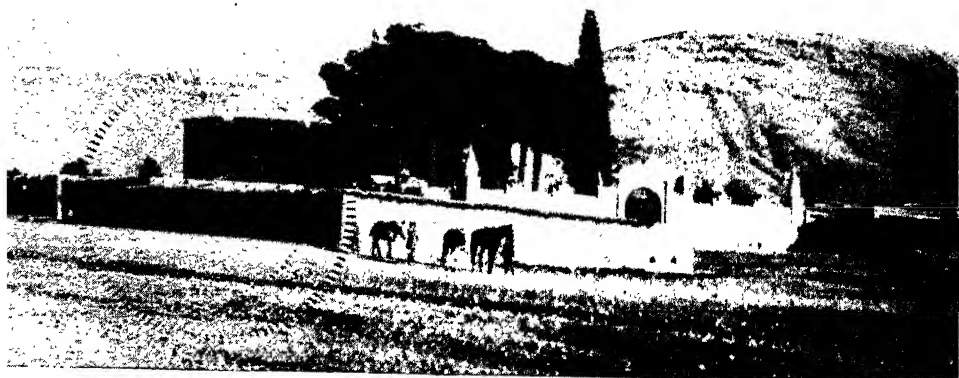


"Valerian's Bridge, a grand pile of seven stone arches, commanded by a fort, fallen into ruin" (p. 137)





"Bellicose khans, at convenient distances for travellers, showed coffee-coloured against the strangely thrown strata" (p. 141)



"Sadi's tomb, set in isolation some way out of the town" (p. 144)



"A small boy led two brightly caparisoned ponies . . . another leading a white donkey with a crimson saddle set upon a brightly woven rug" (p. 144)

"Cypresses and firs towered above the mud wall. Chellan, the Place of Forty Graves." In the foreground lies a vineyard in winter garb (p. 146)

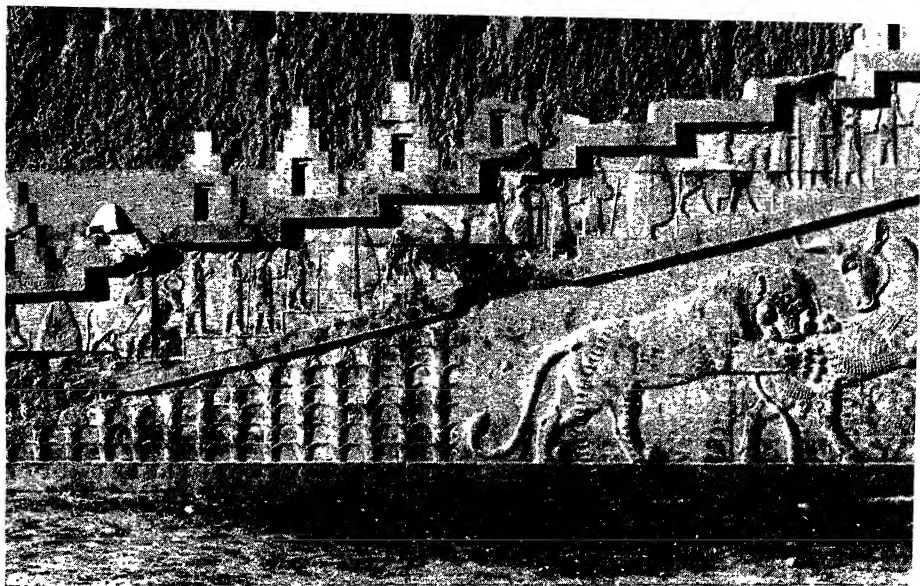




A square pool, choked with autumn leaves from the plane trees, reflected the tomb of Hafiz'' (p. 147)

''The slender columns of Persepolis were silhouetted'' (p. 163)





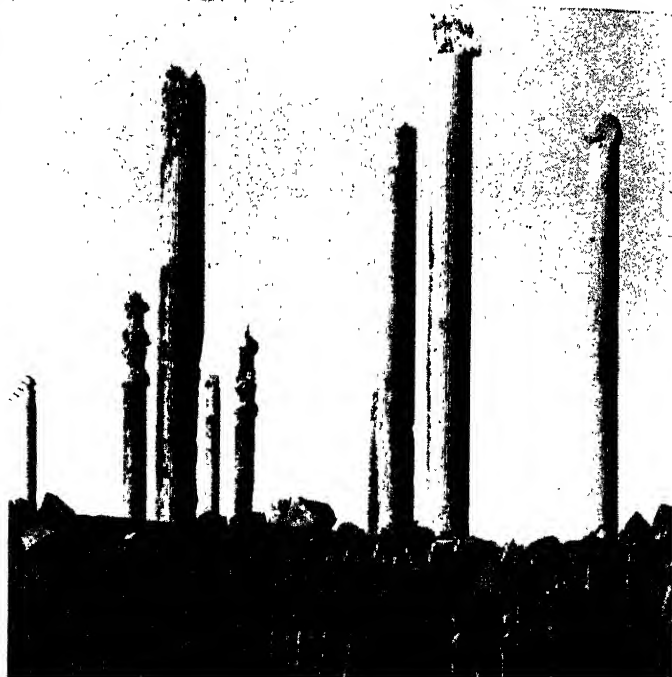
*Bas-reliefs adorning
the façade of the
flight of steps leading
to the Hall of Audience
at Persepolis (p. 165)*



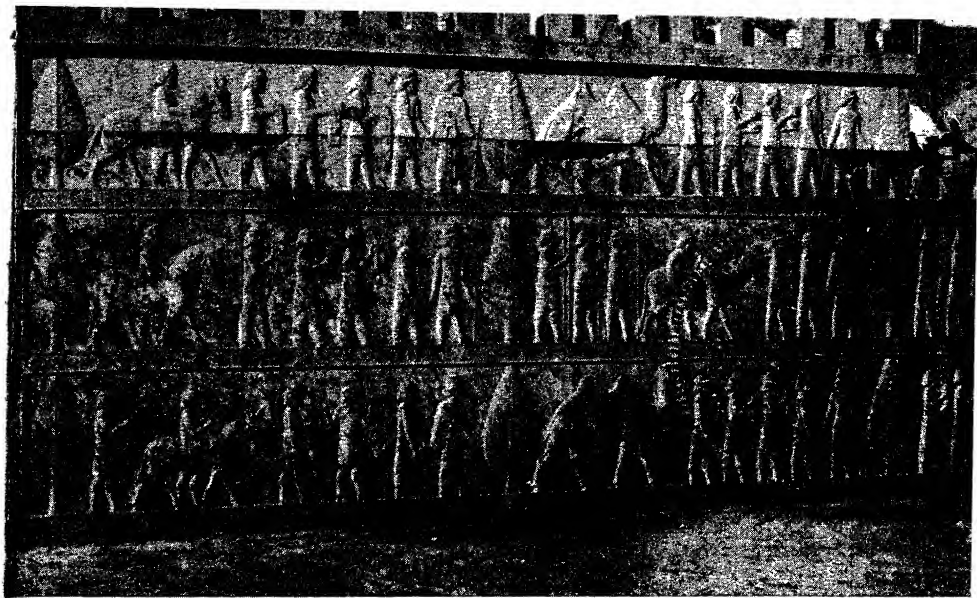
*“Massive blocks of
stone formed two wide
staircases rising to a
paved courtyard, once
bordered by high
walls” (p. 164)*



*"Gaunt stones,
pregnant with age"
(p. 165)*



*"The central motifs
were of a lion, claws
buried deep in the
quarters of a rearing
bull, which raised a
foreleg and pawed the
air in agony" (p. 165)*



*"Upon the sides of the high plinth, figures in
bas-relief" (p. 165)*



*"We passed on our way to what was once the
harem" (b. 166)*



*"Cut into the hill
behind we saw two
ancient tombs, orna-
mented with sculp-
ture" (p. 167)*

*"A flock of fat-tailed
sheep, plump and
well-liking, moving
slowly towards hills
which assumed a
spurious velvety qual-
ity in the winter
sunlight" (p. 172)*





*"Yezdikast, a large,
half-ruined village
perched precariously
on the edge of a deep
gash in the plain"
(p. 182)*

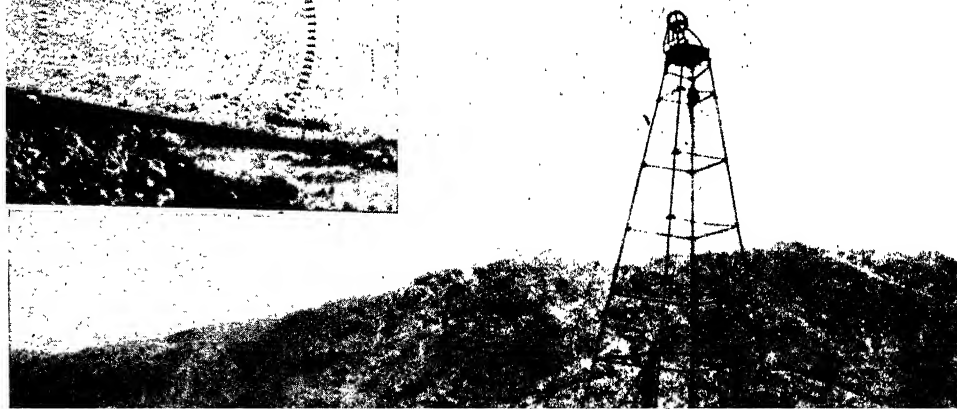


*A new use for old
petrol tins*

*"Flames leapt twenty or thirty feet into the air,
smoke above them" (p. 99)*



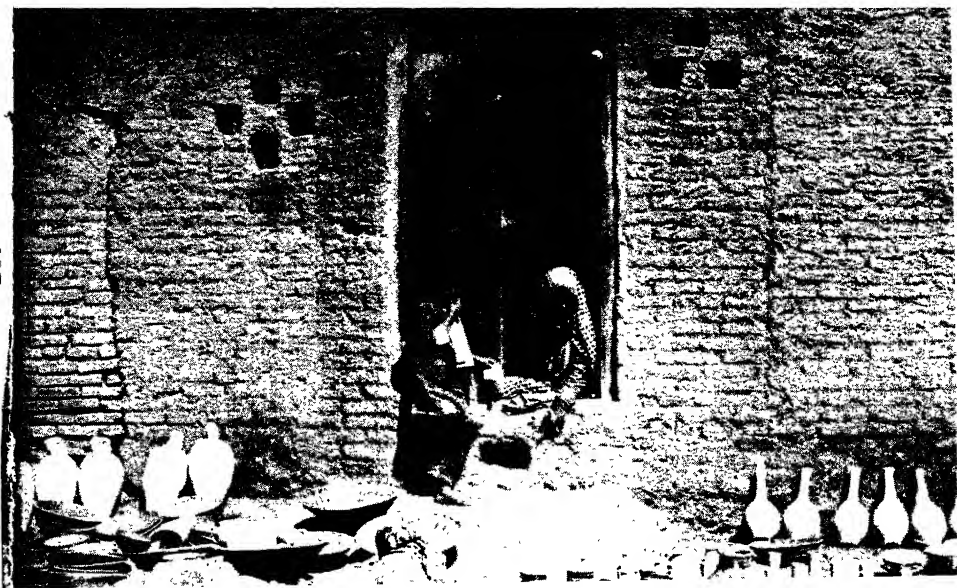
*"A square mile of land in Masjid-i-Suleiman
where they sunk a well called M. one" (p. 102)*





"They produced whole sheepskins, still hairy, which they inflated through a leg. These were then lashed beneath thin, straight branches to form a raft" (p. 107)

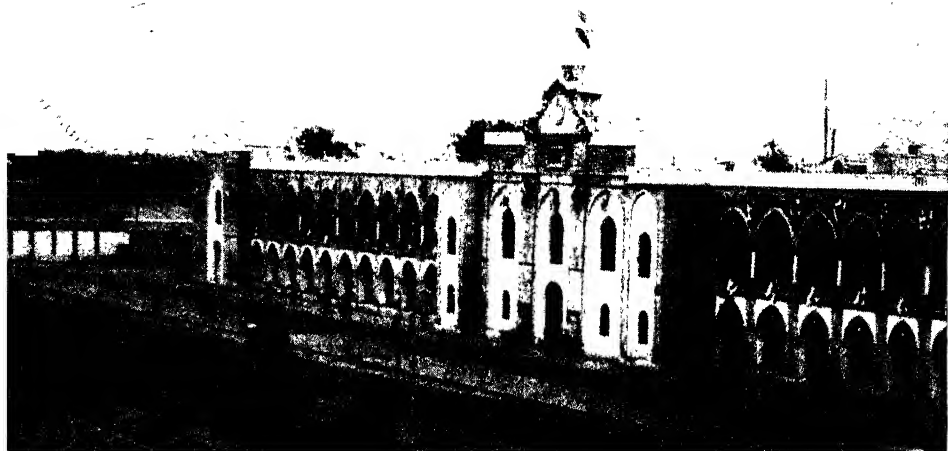
The potter's mite





"Speak unto the believing women... that they restrain their eyes and preserve their modesty"
(p. 261)

The Bank of Iran
(p. 292)





*"Let them thrōw their veils
over their bosoms" (p. 261)*

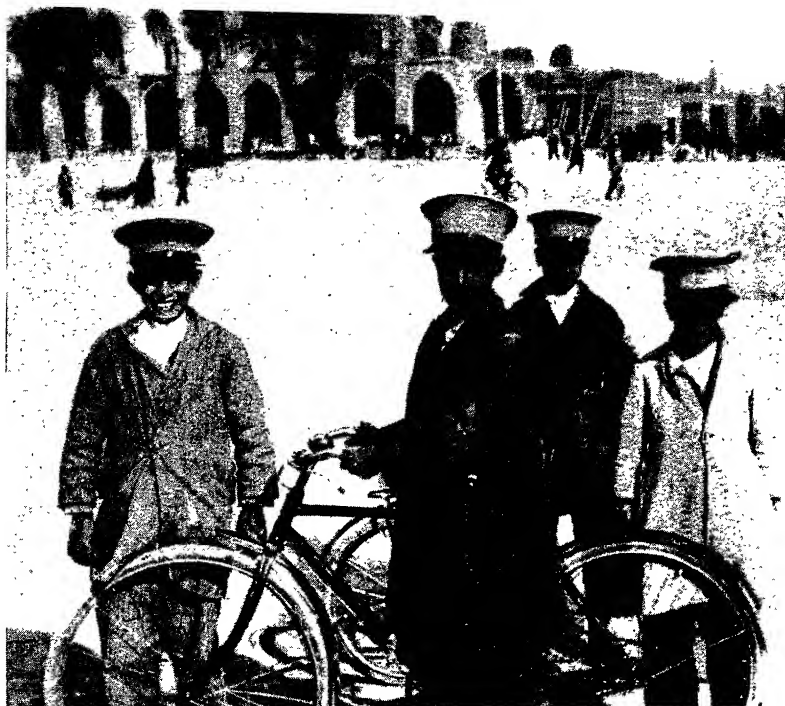


Come fill the cup



\ famous Persian carpet of life-size portraits of ministers and diplomats, at the court of Persia (p.285)

... hundred thou-
sand children attend
the schools'' (p. 293)



"He decreed that his citizens should wear a peaked affair, like a French kepi, but taller'' (p. 295)





se who would trade with her must keep in close and constant touch with her markets'' (p. 303)

"We stopped near a squat tower built astride a stream . . . It was a flour-mill'' (p. 146)



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